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# Lady Elverton's Emeralds

By  
DOROTHEA CONYERS

Author of  
"The Smugglers of Sander"  
"Three Girls and a Harem"  
"Aunt Jane and Uncle James"  
Etc.

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—*Morning Post*

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Etc.

22

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## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

he said, "so when the time comes, and I must burgle for a living, the world's riches are at my feet. Think of it, Evie—the gentleman cracks-man; think of the ease of removing one's friends' valuables or opening one's friends' windows."

"It sounds horrible," the girl said.

"Marching home with strings of jewels to deck you with," he went on, and smiled, knowing he weakness.

"Oh, if you could." She forgot her horror then.

"That pendant we saw in Bond Street, that chain of turquoises and diamonds for my white dress. If I could wear it to-morrow at the Humphreys' party. How they'd stare. Poor Evelyn Ransome with such a possession. Ernest Wilderson, younger son, to give it to her." Her eyes were alight. "I love them so," she said, in almost whimpering tones. "Yes, turn burglar, Ernest, and steal for me."

They laughed together then at their nonsense.

Boy and girl, May stole their senses. They had met under the moonshine, vowing as lovers vow, until, as he put upon her finger a ring he had sold his horse to buy, they swore it was a wedding-ring and they were married. She wrote to him constantly when he was away—mad, foolish outpourings, too carefully kept and treasured. And now there was a ball in Lower Chertton, a big ball, and Eve came flying to him. A rich friend had sent her a dress, a muslin, or unsuitable—it scarcely mattered, since it was there—white brocade, shimmering lustrous, soft a glorious sheath to—





## CHAPTER I

### CLAXTON

"TO my mind," observed Violet St. Maur, with some asperity, "all games are senseless, and this creation which you've brought from tawn, Freddie, is the most senseless of them all."

Freddie Floyd rescued several pop-in-taw balls from the floor, and sighed deeply.

"Sorry, Vi," he said contritely. "Yan loved diabolò, so I thought this would appeal to you—it's just as rotten. Run you another heat for five shillings."

Miss St. Maur looked furiously at the little wooden spades and the elusive glass spheres.

"If you—play fair," she began cautiously. "I know I could beat you. But it's so childish." She took up a wooden spade, put a ball on with her finger, and rolled it on to the case.

"One," she said calmly.

"Well, I call that fair?" said Floyd, diving angrily at one of his six.

Rain was driving hard against the window,



## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

"And when one doesn't hunt, how dull the country is," Violet yawned again. "Nothing but debts would keep me here. How nice if uncle would come back, Freddie, with some one to talk to—the mysterious Mr. Reeves for example."

"A lack of candour," said Captain Floyd quietly, "has never been one of your failings. So you want some one to talk to, Vi? Don't I count?"

"My dear Freddie, you and I have known each other for so long. We've nothing left to talk of. Have we?" Violet laughed carelessly. "No. I wonder who this stranger is. The whole thing is so funny—so peculiar."

"Is it?" said Captain Floyd dismally, but with resignation. He was, unfortunately, accustomed to having the conversation turned from the sentimental vein he wished it to run into. "What's funny? I've not heard of it, Vi."

"You see, this man Reeves came down from nowhere," said Violet, staring at the fire. "He took Barham a week ago, and arrived here with three horses and a groom, but, they say, not a servant in the house. Camps out, the groom says, in the huge dining-room, and boils tea and fries eggs for himself. Auntie's full of it. She has paid at least three calls to discuss it with people. I am sure he was out with the hounds to-day. It's peculiar, Freddie, isn't it?"

Freddie Floyd kicked a log viciously. "Hume Nesbitt was peculiar, and so was Granger," he said. "I wish that word was buried, Vi."

For five long years, since Violet St. Maur had

made her first curtesy to her sovereign. Freddie Floyd had worshipped the merry, wayward girl, who accepted it all and gave him no hope or no reward. Freddie was small, with insignificant features and pale, mild eyes; his fair hair would curl, despite his man's efforts. He was transparently honest and unassuming. Ten years with the Blue Lancers had failed to give him an atom of pride.

Violet, as girls will, had her ideals. They were tall men, dark and masterful, with hints of veiled cleverness behind their somewhat rapid conversation—men who went for the head waiters and the chiefs at big restaurants, pointing out things which they wished altered, or ordering some special dish for another day, and criticised the wine list. While Freddie, who thought dry bread ambrosia, with Violet sitting near him, gobbled up his lunch or dinner in an ordinary way, saying it was all top hole, drank back or whisky-and-water himself, and advised Violet to do the same. Then Freddie had no idea of dead certainties, which generally beset the big handicaps. "That's a bookie's game," he would say mildly. "Bless you, I don't know anything, Vi." He had no mysterious information about coming two-year-olds. He owned to making mistakes at bridge, and his constant lack of self-assertion had served him ill—so much so, that he had watched, with misery, several well-fitted sons of Violet without daring to interfere, that he had dropped by degrees into the position of the young lady's unpaid slave—to help, to feel at, to make,

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

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"I wonder," said Floyd—"I wonder? Now Vi, I"—he got up—"I couldn't give you ropes of rubies, but there are some nice diamonds at home. I've waited a long time, and I couldn't stand another of your violent flirtations. Couldn't you, Vi?"

Decision was upon slighty little Miss St. Maur. Freddie . . . or pressing bills from ravening creditors. Freddie . . . or her father's wrath. Freddie . . . or no London and its joys. Her worldly, careless little brain worked rapidly. It was so dull at Claxton. If she were engaged, there would be some excitement.

"I believe it's all a conspiracy," she burst out pettishly, "getting me down here, all alone—no party."

"Will you, Vi?" he said again, and all the tender light in his eyes failed to touch her, because he was small and insignificant and so very easy to snub. "I've lots of money, don't-cher-know, and you can have my mother's town house for next season. Will you? We've put it off for a long time. I must know—now."

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

made little of, and always to be called back with a carelessly kind smile or word.

"Freddie's so silly," was Violet's verdict, as she fenced him over and over again away from the many proposals he would have made to her.

And now, pretty Violet looked at him thoughtfully. Her father, Lord St. Creton, was not rich; she had run heavily into debt and wanted money. Marriage, decision, loomed before her eyes. She had refused Sir Ralph Hume Nesbitt because he had contradicted and annoyed her. Mr. Granger had abandoned the flirtation of his own account. Her father had already spoken of next summer being spent in Worcestershire, with no London house, no balls and Ascots, Hurlingham, and Savoy suppers, and bridge. Violet clasped her well-made hands, and grew more thoughtful still. She came out of her brown-study, and talked again of the stranger.

"I'll hunt to-morrow, just to see him," she said briskly. "I wonder where auntie and Evelyn are. Mr. Begbie, of course, is walking twenty times up and down the picture-gallery before tea. Freddie"—she leant forward—"what a strange girl Evie is."

"A very unhappy one," said Floyd quietly. "Unhappy! Why, that man she's engaged to is a jewel king. He can load her with diamonds."

"Chain her with rubies, better her with emeralds," said Floyd drily. "Evelyn Gervais had a just, Vi, or I am much mistaken. She has the saddest eyes I've ever seen. And come, for all the jewels, would you marry Begbie?"

"I'd rather marry the poker," said Violet indignantly. "But then Evelyn can pore for hours over stones. She gets out her own and polishes them herself, and arranges them for effect even in their cases. It's a craze with her. She attracted Mr. Begbie's attention at Ross's—she was choosing a brooch for a friend, and he was matching a ruby. Evelyn will be happy, strung about with diamonds and pearls and opals. They are all she wants on earth."

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## 20 Lady Weston's Funerals

"Agnes the maid! For the last time in his  
long lifetime the family 'don't chat know'  
accomplished."

"If you please not to worry me, she said  
willfully. If you please only then I do I  
suppose I will trouble. You've always been  
determined I should haven't got."

He was in her kitchen, her dining for the  
first time to put her sense and her knees into  
into engagements. But Miss West pushed him  
away.

"I want to marry," she said. "We're not  
married yet you know. Trouble." She looked  
at him for some time. And trouble when  
a word of quick authority would have worked  
wonders, wouldn't it?

"Oh, righto," he said carelessly going away,  
bitterly hurt. "A bit hard on't it Vi? But I  
can't grumble. I've got you all for myself at last."

Then came a clatter of hoofs outside.  
"Horse!" said Violet jumping up. "Two."

Uncle has brought some one back. She ran to the  
glass, pulling at her pretty fluffy hair, pecking at the  
lice at her neck, preening her feathers like some  
gay-plumaged little bird.

"It's only old Hilary," said Floyd—his heart-  
love showing in his eyes. "I wasn't worth preening  
up for, Vi."

"You know me unpreened," she said naughtily.  
"It's not old Hilary, by the pecking of my thumbs.  
Listen."

"Oh, just my luck if it's this fellow Reeves,"

thought Floyd wearily. "Just my . . . blessed luck. It's St. Hilary," he said aloud. "Old St. Hilary." He stared at Violet.

"This way, Reeves. Take off your coat here." Sir Henry's big voice rang out cheerily. "We're not so wet, considering the night."

"My prophetic soul, it is Mr. Reeves—is that curl straight?" said Violet, pushing an alluring, provoking face close to Floyd's.

"Ask Mr. Reeves," he said, gruffly for him, going away from the fire to a hard oaken settle near the window. He was very bitterly hurt, but she never saw it.

A blast of fresh rain-laden air whistled in for a moment, then was firmly shut out. Sir Henry, big and bluff and jolly, came in with a slight dark man of uncertain age. His lithe, slender figure belied his worn face. His hair was tinged with grey, but his grey, clear eyes were young and yet very tired.

"It's most awfully kind of you to ask me in," he was saying gratefully. "My poor brute's dead lame. I don't know how I should have got home."

"We'll pack you off in a motor. My niece, Miss St. Maur—Mr. Reeves—Captain Floyd." Sir Henry introduced his guest.

"How do?" said Freddie glumly, from his settle, his eyes on Violet.

But her greeting lacked no cordiality. Fresh worlds to conquer in this dull hole of Claxton. She was so fresh and soft and bright-coloured that Reeves was irresistibly reminded by her of a butterfly, fluttering in summer sunshine.

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

Sir Henry clicked a switch, and the electric light, glowing from strange old lamps and from imitation candles in massive sconces, flooded the old room. Reeves drew a sudden, quick breath, a sigh, half wonder, half despair.

"It's a very lovely room," he said softly.

"We pride ourselves upon our hall. Tea, James. Good Lord, what's that!" for the butler, coming swiftly, suddenly trod short and skidded with some lack of grace across the polished floor. Being brought up short by a Persian rug, he gasped apology.

Then, having angrily declaimed to his master that "them there 'popping-tow' balls was all over the place," he turned with extreme caution.

"Tea, James. Tell her ladyship, James," said Sir Henry; "or would you prefer anything stronger?" he asked Reeves.

"Than her ladyship," muttered Freddie, with rude witticism; but it passed unnoticed.

Reeves would have tea. He stared about absently, and the short, sharp sigh broke twice from his lips. A handsome man as he stood in his dark hunting-coat; and Violet saw that he was.

"How cold you look," she said, flinging a great log upon the fire and smiling with welcoming eyes.

"I don't feel it; it's warm in here," he said, half smiling. "You make it so, Miss St. Maur," he added, with quiet meaning.

She stared at him, growing interested. Was it sarcasm or pure compliment? Freddie Floyd, by pounding his heels against the oaken chest, made her feel sure it was the latter, so she laughed.

"And you're our new neighbour?" she prattled. "Oh, we must see a lot of you, Mr. Reeves. It's so lonely down here."

"Lonely—in this house?" he said, half to himself, still staring about him. "Sir Henry tells me you've a little party—Mr. Begbie the jewel man, his fiancée, you, and——"

"Captain Floyd," broke in Violet sharply; she was not going to be paired off with Freddie so quickly.

They talked on, but, for all the girl's butterfly prettiness and open desire to prove attractive, the man's answers were absent. He seemed to study every detail about him more than her. The flash of twilight reflected in armour and polished wainscot, the weapons and great elks' heads and foxes' masks, the comfort of the deep chairs, the harmonising tints of tapestries and shaded lights—he gazed dreamily at them all.

"An English house," he said, half to himself, as Violet chattered. "Forgive me, Miss St. Maur, but it is so long since I have seen a home like this, or any one like you," he added simply.

She flashed quick approval at him, and then Freddie's heels drummed again.

"You've been abroad then, shut away from England?" she asked, growing even more interested.

"Yes, I've been shut away from England," he said grimly—"prisoned by cruel circumstance; and it's rather wonderful to come back and see it all again. Not that my stay here will be long."



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he went on dreamily, "but it will be very pleasant. Hunting; there was none where I was"—a flash of humour crossed his grave face. "Friends such as I'd almost forgotten to think of——" He stopped, staring at the glowing fire.

James came in with tea, laying the big tables deftly, covering them with fine embroidered damask, putting down cakes of many varieties, sandwiches, a dish of poached eggs for hungry sportsmen, lighting a spirit-lamp under a copper kettle, arranging old china cups.

"Tea, miss," he announced urbanely, and put his feet upon another ball, starting as he did so. The door banged open.

"Why, here's auntie," said Violet—in such a hurry, too. "What is it, Auntie? Here's Mr. Reeves. Mr. Reeves—my aunt. Uncle's gone to change. What is it? Auntie, what has happened?"

Lady Elverton was small and slight and well-preserved, the fervour of an undying youth shining in her excitable eyes. No touch of her preservation was exaggerated or overdone, and the clever massaging and faint powdering gave no hint of youth clung to grotesquely, but rather of age—middle age—cajoled and softened until he could not be harsh to the gentle lady who mocked at him and thrust him away.

"My dear"—Lady Elverton put a hand somewhere in Reeves's direction—"such news. The Greivilles' house was broken into last night, and her diamonds are gone. Marvin is just back from Claxton, full of it. Lady Julia's got hysterics, and the police

are there, and Dick Greville says it's her fault"—she spoke without any stops—"and you know it will be my emeralds next. The Martins found an open window on Tuesday, but nothing gone; they keep a dog. There's a burglar here!" panted Lady Elverton. "Freddie, do you hear—why is Freddie over there?—a burglar. Here!"

"Fellow with a jemmy and a fur cap. Oh, I know," said Freddie intelligently.

"A jewel thief," said Reeves, knitting his brows. "Here in Claxton—in this quiet place."

"But we've some reputation for jewels," explained Lady Elverton, pouring out tea in a distracted way. "Julia's yellow diamonds are historical, and there are Lucy Grant's rubies and other things, and my emeralds—they're priceless. He won't find those, at any rate, if he does come."

"You keep them in the bank?" asked Reeves, as he took his tea.

"No, I don't; I couldn't wear them then. But I keep them safe. Burglar-proof safes, too, are silly."

"And singularly easy to open," said Reeves thoughtfully. "Yes."

"Oh, by the way"—Lady Elverton flitted from her subject—"do tell me, Mr. Reeves, if you are one of the Hampshire family?"

"No," he said. "I'm not from Hampshire."

"No? I hope you'll find Claxton pleasant," she said, beginning to think of something else besides the robbery.

"As pleasant as any part of the world could be



## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

to me. What hut cakes your cook makes, Lady Elverton."

She was fussing over her tea-table, measuring cream, putting in sugar, offering every one half a dozen things to eat at once.

"Good? Oh, do have some more—or some biscuits, or sandwiches, or an egg, and jam! Sir Henry will be quite angry if you don't. Not Hampshire?—King's Lynn, perhaps, then. I knew Ethel, Dick's wife. Which are you?—I mean of which branch?"

Reeves took another cake carefully.

"I'm a colonial," he said, a little sharply, "and all my people are dead—lost to me."

"How sad! Oh, then, you must let me help you to look them up!" said the little woman briskly.

"I know every one. Oh, dead, you said?" She stopped, confused, staring at him with a puzzled look. "I'm sorry—how stupid of me! I mean their relations—they must have dead relations, or being dead must have—oh——"

"Auntie," said Violet, in shocked tones.

"Exactly—charmed," said Reeves, as his hostess ran down like a cheap mechanical toy, in jerks and dying bounds of speech.

"Evelyn is late," said Violet, changing the conversation. "And so you are one of those fortunate people who have no relations, Mr. Reeves?"

"Not one," he said. "I lost them all."

"And tell me, is it really true you live like a hermit, and boil dampers and billies—isn't that Australian?—for yourself?"

He laughed.

"Colonials are used to cooking," he said. "Yes, until my own servants follow me, I prefer to do without strangers. Mrs. Barham's picture chaperones me, and old Mrs. Hodge scrubs and makes my bed, and brings me home tough chops. What more do I want?"

"Oh, ask me to tea before the servants come!" Violet cried. "Make me a damper yourself, and fry it. I can cook—that is, I saw a man scramble eggs once at a picnic, and I put in the salt."

"They said the result was like the Dead Sea," put in Freddie, from his settle.

"No relations? But you've come to find new friends at Claxton," said Lady Elverton, quite oblivious of all the interlude and faintly troubled by her speeches.

"For a time," said Reeves; "kind as you are to me, I shall be called elsewhere. It can only be for a little time."

## CHAPTER II

### A MEETING

FREDDIE FLOYD culked upon his settle, a much-injured man. Even as he had lifted the cup of long-deferred bliss to his lips, this thin, quiet stranger had come upon the stage, and Violet—slighty, irresponsible little Violet—was all eyes for him, because he lived alone, with the shadow of some mystery surrounding him. For ordinary, everyday men do not take big houses—come there alone, with no one save old Mrs. Hodge to come in each morning and wash up.

What tragic story had furrowed the clever, handsome face? Its very tragedy would attract Violet. She hovered about the man, flushed and interested, until Floyd, growing chilled in his corner, wondered what blight lay upon his conversation that he could not make the little butterfly flutter her wings at him. He loved her, sent her sweets and flowers, watched for the faintest wish that he might grant it, and all seemed to go for nothing when any stranger came upon the scene.

It grew so chill upon his settle that he crossed

nearer the fire, just as Violet, tired of her aunt, thought she would like Mr. Reeves to herself for a little.

"You look so cold," prattled Miss Violet softly.

"And yet it is strangely warm," he returned absently. "A haven of warmth and rest."

Crackle and plash came a storm of rain against the windows, followed by a roar of storm-torn branches outside.

"Cold!" A flashing smile lit up the man's thin face. "I may be physically cold, Miss St. Maur; mentally, I bask—bask."

"Sit over there, then," suggested Violet, faintly puzzled, pointing over her shoulder to the sofa, which her desolate and disconsolate lover had just moved to.

Reeves, still absent, crossed to it, plumping down by a silent and sulky Freddie, who, looking gloomily at space, scarcely noticed him.

Now pretty Miss Violet, looking round, saw Freddie, observed that her *lôte-à-lôte* was spoiled, and a flash of mischief lit her willful face.

"Tea, Freddie!" she called out.

Freddie came, obedient and contented as a dog, a metaphorical tail wagging hard, as he demanded cream and sugar and buns, declared himself to be very hungry, and sat down close by Violet. Happy again, because his little love had noticed him, forgetting everything else.

"I'm comfy now, and quite contented," he whispered in a foolish, loverlike voice. "This is rippin', ain't it—bein' engaged?"

"Sure?" Violet poured herself out more tea and carefully balanced a wedge of cake in the saucer.

"Certain sure, don't cher know," murmured Freddie, munching hot toast.

"Then I can go and talk to Mr. Reeves," said my lady, with a laugh, and stepped across, leaving Floyd to tea which suddenly grew black and bitter and bread which turned to lead.

Was this to be his life? A careless word of kindness, a smile, and Violet, his wife, amusing herself with any man who took her fleeting fancy. But he had waited so long, he could wait longer—until his butterfly grew tired of roaming, and flew, with some of the gloss, perhaps, off her glossy wings, to his heart. She would be the same to him, as sweet and as fair as in her wilful youth. Freddie Floyd was not the stuff strong men are made of; he could only wait.

They rattled out low-toned conversation on the sofa near the fire, Reeves thawing before this pretty girl's friendliness. If she wanted to flirt, should he gainsay her? Yet the tail of his eye rested with some compunction upon Captain Floyd, who, turning a deaf ear to his hostess's words, sat wrapped in gloomy silence, staring at them.

Then, rising, he returned to his distant settle, where he lighted a cigarette, and sat unheeded.

"More tea, Mr. Reeves?" Lady Elverton grew lonely at her tea-table.

"Oh, here's Hal—and Freddie, where's Freddie? Good gracious, he's on the settle again in the cold!

Henry!"—Lady Elverton called to her husband—"have you heard about the burglary? Tell me while you have your tea."

Sir Henry's tea was a meal of much movement. He drank some and poked the fire; he ate a piece of toast and sat down, and got up again to eat the other half, talking nearly all the time, and quite satisfied if some one answered him occasionally.

The burglaries obsessed him—he tramped from spot to spot, reasoning, arguing, with no one to advance another argument, and at each turn praying his wife to abandon her life's idea and to put her emerald necklace in the bank, and then declaiming in the same breath that the house could not be robbed.

"These patent fastenings," he said, "invented by myself. See, the man lifts the window, and the bell rings directly he turns the catch—they are connected every night."

"And your burglar"—Reeves fingered the connecting-wire—"cuts a pane of glass out, snips the connection softly, and comes in unheard. Besides, ten to one, he is concealed somewhere downstairs, having slipped in during the fuss of dinner. Cracksman Jim did that in the Hawke robbery. He came as a messenger with fruit, and never left."

"I didn't read of it in the trial," said Sir Henry.

"No?" Reeves spoke absently. "He thought of future occasions, no doubt, so cut a pane out to look well, and he—" A sudden flood of scarlet dyed Reeves's thin face; he bent over the fastenings, examining them minutely. "Send the world back

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to old-fashioned, thick shutters," he said, after a time; "drilling through those with half a dozen bells to ring at every shake is not half so nice. The present method might be called the housebreaker's friend," he added whimsically.

"Here's fresh tea." His hostess called him over. "It's come now. So the Greville diamonds escaped," she said, as she poured some out. "She hides them as I hide mine—carelessly."

"As you hide yours." Sir Henry jerked impatiently at his windows. "Your centre stone would buy her necklace. It's an heirloom, Reeves, and I am responsible to the heirs I haven't got"—here he stroked his chin sadly—"that is to certain nephews, for its value."

"You keep it very carefully, I trust," said Reeves in his low voice.

"In careful carelessness. My dear Mr. Begbie, we had almost given you up."

A thin, precise, hawk-eyed man came stiffly in—upright as a dart, narrow shouldered, something automatic in his stilted movements. Men said this Harold Begbie knew no human kindness and no mercy; that dreary tales of poverty were merely joys to him, since they gave him the chance of some fresh jewel, some stone to help in his new chain of sapphires, some quaint old ornament with rare black pearls about it. His keen eyes, peering through their pince-nez, seemed to find hidden flaws and cracks; his cold voice frightened the poor sellers into asking half what they had hoped for and taking perhaps an eighth. There were human tears crystallized in

the collector's pearl ropes; heart's blood in his fiery rubies; chilling, changed hopes in the flame-lit opals. Small chance for a burglar in Harold Begbie's house, where a step at night near the strong-room would set electric alarms whirring, flash on lights; where an outstretched, unwary hand groping might turn on the switch which rang up the Yard itself.

Skilled cracksmen shrugged shoulders, and passed by. Nothing short of an explosion of dynamite could bring them a shower of jewels from that house.

"I fear I am late, Lady Elverton," he said slowly. "I was discussing the burglary. Ah——" and, like James, the thin man slid for a space, clawing irritably, slipping on an elusive pop-in-taw sphere of glass. He stooped to pick it up, glancing severely at Violet, who was giggling helplessly.

"We need scarcely ask who was playing with these. Miss St. Maur. Ah! you and Captain Floyd. Precisely. The box—where is it?"

"There," muttered Violet, pointing to the settle, and stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth. Mr. Begbie slipping had amused her.

Now, Mr. Begbie was short-sighted, and Freddie sat in dimness. The sharp dropping of the pop-in-taw ball on to Captain Floyd's sleek head was not premeditated, and the immediate escape of subdued bad language sent the astonished Begbie almost skipping backwards, apologising deeply. Having then carefully placed the little ball in its place, he went for his tea, very much annoyed and shaken. He too was full of the burglary.

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## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

"It's most mysterious," he said, in his jerky, hard voice. "A burglar here, at Claxton. I am distressed, for Evelyn's rings and pearls and blue diamonds are well worth attention—the latter took me ten years to collect."

"That's Begbie, isn't it?" said Reeves to Lady Elverton in a low voice—"the jewel collector?"

"Yes, and of such jewels," she said—"they make me break all the Commandments."

"They induce most women to do that," he said grimly.

"And his fiancée, Evelyn, will show off his lovely things," she went on, in her quick voice. "She is very handsome."

"Evelyn?" he said, and turned pale. "Evelyn—who?"

"Gerraise," Violet answered.

"Oh!" he sighed a little. "Loves jewels as well as her future husband perhaps."

"Loves them!" Susie Elverton almost cried it out; "I should think she does. She is bathed in their flash and shimmer. I've never seen a woman so wrapped up in jewels. Her trousseau is a chosen to match each stone. Her gowns are a mere setting to the gorgeous wonders Mr. Begbie can deck her in. Black for ropes of pearls, mauve for emeralds, oyster for her sapphire, her wedding-dress for the diamonds."

"A dress made of white brocade," broke in Reeves sharply.

"Why, how on earth did you know?" said his hostess, amazed.

"It's an ordinary explanation," he answered dully.

At this moment Mr. Begbie, carrying his full teacup, tripped upon another glass offender, just as Violet, tired of waiting, asked for fresh tea, which she did not want, and called to Reeves to get it for her.

Marching woodenly, Begbie crossed to the distant settle—it would never have entered into his head to put the ball down upon a table, or anywhere except in its proper place. Reeves came across with the cup; and Evelyn Gerreise, in dusky grey, a rope of pearls showing milk-white against the dusk, came swiftly in.

A splendid woman, tall, regally handsome—deep grey eyes glowing under a low broad forehead, a red mouth set in scornful lines, deep-chested, slender-hipped, beauty before which dainty Violet's paled as a gay forget-me-not beside a queenlike rose.

"I'm sorry I am late," she began; then started and stood still, pale as death, her eyes set in dismay as she reeled and caught at a chair, and then all the scorn about her mouth seemed to leap into her deep grey eyes. They had parted, these two, on a soft May evening, star lit and summer sweet, with twitter of birds about them and scent of hawthorn and cowslips on the silky air. They met—thus.

"You!" she breathed—"you!" and reeled again; and Reeves dropped the cup deliberately.

"Steady, Evie!" he whispered, his thin face as set as hers. "Steady!"

# Lady Elverton's Emeralds

single blue stone, flashing as it moved, to her aunt's diamond-decked tea-gown.

"Dear Heaven!" he said. "You believe"—he laughed aloud, as Lucifer might have laughed, falling from heaven—"oh, clever Evie," he said, "you believe . . . that . . . ?"

"Don't call me by my name," she said, regally—"that lies behind."

"Lies cold with truth and honour and a man's dead faith," he murmured. "It slips out, Evie—slips out. I'm here to hunt for a little, and keep three horses, so we shall meet perhaps to-morrow, and I'll see you ride again. How you used to go on Maymorn, she'd hardly carry you now—you're heavier. They are friends of yours, these Elvertons? You met them—"

"Abroad," she said. "After I'd changed my name. The old one was mentioned in—" She passed shuddering flashing furtive, accusing glances at him.

"In my affairs," he said lightly, mockingly. "Yes."

"And now—she laid her untasted tea down—"you are not to come here—understand that they are my friends, these people. What would they say if they knew I let you come among them, and never warned them? I cannot tell them even now what brings you here—but you must go, that I swear to"—she spoke in a low, urgent tone.

"Leave Chester—I don't think so," he said. "It is my home for a little space—before I go. I don't care if it interests me. I do not care

to go. We can't talk here. Your future owner is glaring basilisk-like from behind his glasses. Miss St. Maur is flitting about like an injured butterfly, and her future owner is still upon the settle, also glowering. They are sending me back in the motor; but we must meet to talk things over, say to-morrow, when the hounds are out, and I'm dining here to-morrow night."

"You're not—not dining here," she said. "Ernest, don't force me to tell them what you are."

"And what if two played at telling?" he said, with averted face. "May evenings were sweet, Evie; there was a foolish, loving woman alive in those days, and she wrote certain letters. What if two played at telling? Do you remember how——"

"Oh, hush!" she implored—"hush!" and looked across at Begbie. He was sketching designs on a sheet of drawing-paper, moving little paste stones into the spaces, so as to see what they looked like, and seemed absorbed; but he glanced across more than once at the two who were talking so earnestly in each other, and her eyes grew troubled.

"Think of the jewels, Evie . . . you would not like to lose them now, and let me be. I shall not trouble you for long."

She sat silent, plucking at the pearls, great globes of milky softness, the fruits of years of close selection—some said no finer rope existed; they were twisted about her throat, and hung to her waist, weighted by a single opal with flames which leaped scarlet and blue and angry green as she moved, and the

The diamond flashed from her wrist. It made a pendant, or a bouché in other settings.

Evelyn Gervaise had known poverty, and her future dazzled her. To lose it would mean returning to cheap London lodgings, to the dragging years she had passed through. Chance had sent her fortune. Could she let chance steal it from her?

She flung her head up with a quick gesture of mingled scorn and fear and uncertainty.

"If I only knew what brings you here," she said.

"If I knew——"

Begbie's voice broke across the silence.

"The only safeguard for women who live in the country is the Parisian Diamond Company," he said. "Let them keep imitations in their badly guarded houses, and leave the valuable originals at the bank. Country houses are impossible to safeguard. Take this place as an example. A burglary here this week—a thief among us."

Evelyn Gervaise sprang to her feet, her chair going over with a crash. Dumb, wide-eyed, she listened, and stared at Reeves.

"This week—this . . . week" she whispered.

"Don't look so terrified, Evelyn," said Begbie. "I will take your jewels from you every evening, and Patch, the terrier, sees to my safety. Besides, if the man comes here he will look for Lady Elverton's emeralds. He will not think of you."

They came about the fire chattering, talking of the robbery. Reeves was carried off again by Violet, goaded to fresh mischief by Freddie's uncerement of their engagement.— But

as the motor came round, and Reeves was packed into it, Evelyn found a moment to get near him.

"You are not to come here again," she said below her breath, "or I will tell them."

"Take care. If you do that," he answered swiftly and proudly, and started for his lonely home.



## CHAPTER III

### THE CHESTNUT HORSE

THERE are better places and worse places to hunt from than Claxton. Foxes abound, kept up by sporting landowners; the farmers are cheery folk, and wire is little seen; but there is too much plough, and the blind thorn-grown banks and wide ditches take a lot of doing. Irish horses do best across it. Quick jumpers from fly countries soon find themselves down over the trappy banks, or labouring, foam-covered, in the sticky plough. But there are tracks of grassland across which hounds run fast and horses can gallop, and plenty of fun is to be got there.

Reeves knew of the pack. He had seen the advertisement of Barham, and, the two suiting him, he had come down to Claxton.

Sitting over his solitary breakfast—he had fried his own eggs-and-bacon and made his own tea—lines of pain graven deep upon his face—lines of pain and recklessness. This meeting with his lost love had been so unexpected; it had dragged

the past from its place of decent burial, and brought it, racked by decay, to the light.

It was easy to swear that he had forgotten and would forget—but of what avail to-day, with that dead thing before him? Six years to decay in. Six years of worse than death to him. He looked down at his white hands, scarred here and there, and laughed bitterly. There were few things he did not know now. Few secrets he could not see at will. A locked door stood behind him in the vast, dreary room. Locked closely, the Barhams had stipulated nothing was to be disturbed. He went across to it, laughing in the same way, pausing to look round the long room, with its dull, brick-red paper and worn carpet and heavy curtains. A dining-room, in some people's eyes, need possess no beauty save that of solidity. He had pulled the heavy dining-room table to one side and carried in some easy chairs from the damp old drawing-room, and ate off a small round table by the fire.

The kitchen was a cavernous, beetle-haunted palace, so he kept frying-pan and saucepan and his scant stock of provisions in the sideboard, leaving the cooking things for the old scrubber, who had interested Violet, to clean. A busy, stout dame, engaged not to chatter.

"My own servants will soon be here. Until then don't betray my strange bachelor ways, Mrs. Hodge. If I hear anything outside, I get some one else."

Pay was liberal; she was allowed to do most of

the shopping. Mrs. Hodge was sensible, and avoided gossiping.

Reeves looked again at the cupboard. He was utterly reckless this morning. He took some strange wires and then keys from his pockets, twisting for a minute, and the cupboard door flew open. It was a deep angle forming a recess, but empty save for huge grey cobwebs and misshapen crooked-legged horrors which crawled in their woven gloom.

"Spiders," he said aloud. "The Barhams are careful of their livestock." He pulled the door to without locking it, and went to the corresponding door at the other side of the fireplace. This swung back to show a small cupboard, furnished with shelves, and full of china. A Lowestoft tea-set, all painted with dainty, stemless roses, stood on the top shelf. He lifted a cup down.

"My teeth grit on that cheap white stuff," he said. "I'll drink out of these in future, and brew my tea in this." He took up a quaint old teapot, blue and scarlet and gold—Worcester, so far as he knew.

"If Mrs. Barham saw me," he went on comically, looking up at a picture of a hook-nosed, fussy-looking woman which hung against the brick-coloured paper. "Even when she locked the cupboard she had qualms of fear," he went on. "I'll bet she chose the paper because it would not dirty easily, and those funereal curtains for the same reason." Barham, my landlady, see me drink

tea afresh in the brilliant-coloured tea-

pot, poured his store of tea from a paper bag into a quaint old caddy, put his frizzled sausage into a red-and-gold plate, and laughed again.

"It's something to annoy people, even if they don't feel it," he said, always aloud. The sound of his own voice was company.

Old Mrs. Hodge coming, heavy-footed, gasped at the new display, and "thought as 'ow Mrs. Barham 'ad the chaney cupboard locked, setting great store on them old things."

"But I had the key, you see," said Reeves gaily. "Wash 'em carefully, Mrs. Hodge. They'll charge us a guinea a cup for smashes." This advice nearly causing Mrs. Hodge to break one at once.

He went off to get into boots and coat. His groom meeting him in the yard with a long-tailed, well-bred grey. Not quite enough stuff in her for Claxton valley ploughs, but a wear-and-tear sort that would struggle on when she was done, and jump freely to the last. This grey, a fired bay, and the roan he had left, dead lame, at the Elvertons', completed the stud. Neyers the groom lived above the harness-room, cooking for himself. The three horses seemed lost in the big, half-kept yard, with grass growing in the cobble-stones, with dreary drips from leaking shoots—the Barhams scamped repairs—and peeling doors and broken windows.

As they had to leave, they would not spend any money on the place—hence the difficulty of letting it, and the low rent which Reeves had to pay.

He swung himself into the saddle. The grey

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

are's wriggle of freshness and stealing, pleasant  
tion beginning to banish his gloomy thoughts.  
"More burglaries, sir," observed the groom,  
oking at the bits. "Tempt on Lord Lewis's  
lace last night, sir," said Neyers, as he held the  
tirrup. "Police are fair mad—they talks of  
having Lunnon down."

"Of having Lunnon down"—Reeves checked the  
mare's easy jog, remembering the words, and glanced  
about him uneasily. "Lunnon" knew too much—  
its memory was too long. Then he shrugged his  
shoulders and rode on.

The meet was at Harley Court. The wide lawn  
was dotted with horses, with motors panting up;  
hounds were grouped near the door, the hunt ser-  
vants taking sips of cherry brandy and surrep-  
titiously dropping cake and biscuits to the hounds.

Hilary Everton, the master, lavished money on  
his pack, and, although slightly on the heavy side—  
it took noses and not pace to kill a fox across the  
ploughs—they were eighteen couple of straight-  
legged, well-balanced dogs, which any man might  
have been proud of.

The Claxton Hall party were there. Reggie,  
who rode for his health, mounted on a narrow,  
quiet-looking brown; Sir Henry on a big weight  
carrier; Floyd on a thoroughbred, Violet riding a  
fractious, irritable cob, her pretty little face aglow  
with delight, and she encouraged him to prance.  
Violet on a sober hunter would have seemed out of  
place.

And Evelyn? Reeves looked round him. She

used to ride so much. He saw her at last, galloping a big chestnut round the lawn. A hot-tempered, Roman-nosed brute, showing the whites of his restless eyes as he came striding up. Flinging up his head, and snatching ill-temperedly at his bit. Violet, seeing Reeves, came see-sawing across—the cob standing quite quiet when she really wanted him to.

"Mr. Begbie's a better buyer of jewels than he is of horses," she said, nodding at the chestnut. "He says he picked that one up most reasonably, considering its size. I'm sure he took it for an off-colour ruby, and he's given it to Evelyn. I believe it runs away. Look!"

The chestnut raked its head loose, pawing furiously, half reared, and then walked sullenly towards them, Begbie eyeing it with some pride.

"A very fine animal, Evelyn," he remarked. "I consider it an excellent bargain."

"What did you pay?" Reeves asked abruptly.

"Thirty pounds. The animal passed a vet. He came yesterday."

"Thirty pounds!" Reeves burst out. "Why, as a sound horse the brute's worth two hundred."

"So I thought," smiled Begbie pleasantly. "A slight flaw somewhere, no doubt."

"Then can't you see there must be something very wrong with him? He must have run away; played some horrible trick. I wish, Miss Gervaise, you'd let me try him to-day, and you ride this mare."

Evelyn looked at him slowly. There were dark

lines under her eyes. She looked jaded and ill at ease.

"I had rather not, thank you," she said stiffly.

A small man, passing by, glanced sharply up at Reeves, who, looking at him carelessly, started and looked again, feeling sure he had seen him somewhere. He was a little weasly-looking fellow, with a heavy moustache and a crop of curling black hair.

"Any idea who that is?" he said to Sir Henry.

"That? Oh, yes—Bateson. He has taken Raikes's cottage and garden; is going in for the French system. Came to my gardener for advice yesterday. A nice, hard-working little fellow."

The master, who had been obliged to eat some unneeded breakfast, was coming out. A strong-backed, lean-headed, flea-bitten grey was jogged up ~~to the steps for him, and they would move off in a~~ minute. The sun flashed on the French windows of the old house, where they opened on to a grey stone terrace.

"See there!" Reeves pointed with his whip. "Your burglar-proof homes of England. I'll wager there are no shutters on those, and a man simply cuts a piece out, slips the catch, and walks in; or, easier still, knowing—having watched or knowing which rooms are lived in—steps up in the dusk before the catches are up, lies doggo below a sofa, and has the house at his mercy."

"And as the Protheroes never enter the blue drawing-room—Esther died there suddenly—it would be singularly easy to hide in it," said Violet.

"You see those bright blue curtains, those are the windows. By the way," she prattled on, "Harris complained of you. You sent him home and walked, in the dark—from Tatton corner."

"There's a short way in there," he said carelessly. "A gap in the Barham walls."

"You might have met the burglar and been sandcracked. Isn't that it?" suggested Floyd. "He made his attempt on the Lewis's about seventy-three—just at dinner-time. But her terrier rushed out, and the man cleared off. The library window was open, books didn't interest him, so he cleared empty fist. Rockhampton gate is just where you got off, so you might have seen something—the chip running, y'know."

"I saw nothing," said Reeves absently. "I went in and through the gap and home. It was dark and late. I walked back quickly."

"To meet the scrubber?" Evelyn's voice rang out rather shrilly and anxiously.

"To meet no one. I cook my own dinner," he returned gravely.

She touched the chestnut with her heel, the bugua in horseflesh answering by a furious bound, and they jogged on. The Protheroes kept pheasants, but, as is Middlesbrough custom, they kept foxes too. A brace were seen on foot, slipping from wood to wood until one wearied of galloping in the wide gate-swept circle.

Reeves jolted up after two rounds, and some one bumping into him from behind, almost knocked him over. It was Evelyn Gervaise on her chestnut.



She was white and tired, and as he caught the horse and steadied it, he could see her gloves were cut.

"That brute's not fit for you to ride," he said sharply. "Won't you change with me?"

She shook her head. "The horse was bought for me, and I had better learn to ride him. But there is no chance of a run; we can talk here in the shelter. I ask you now, What do you mean to do? I must know."

He bent low over his horse's mane, fidgeting with the carefully brushed hairs. Then he looked her straight in the face. "I mean to stay here for a time," he said steadily.

"Coming among us all! Dining with Sir Henry! If you say that, then I must tell them—what you are. Don't you see—I must?"

"And—if you do, I shall tell them what—we were," he answered, hating himself for the bullying words.

She winced and flushed. Riches, comfort, were new to her. She did not want to throw them lightly away. She watched a stiff, awkward-looking rider cantering his sober brown in the wake of the flying chase, as hounds burst from another spinney, close on their tiring prey. As Evelyn Gervaise, companion to her cousin, who would not betray her, her past bore looking into. As Evelyn Sandys, whose name had been freely bruited forth to the public, she knew the man who took her as a peg to hang his jewels on would put her, without compunction, back on her shell, still more certainly if he saw her mad letters.

"Shall we, therefore, sign a compact?" he asked a little wearily, seeing her frightened face. "I want a little breathing space. A little time to go as a gentleman among my fellows before I—disappear. I do you no harm, do I?"

"If I could think so," she breathed, and his face grew hard. He knew what she was thinking of. And, with the knowledge, every good feeling seemed to wilt and wither as tender seedlings in a black frost's grip.

"You piece of beautiful intolerance," he said, half to himself. "Well, Evie—Miss Gervaise, is it peace or war?"

"I'll tell you this evening," she said, with white, dry lips. Her fiancé was cantering towards them. Hounds had killed in the beech wood by the western entrance.

"Thank Heaven! We shall draw Leyton now, and have a hunt." Violet came up with Begbie.

The thin man looked at Reeves thoughtfully.

"I don't know how it is, Reeves," he said, "but I seem to know your face. Can we have met anywhere?"

"It's such an ordinary face," Reeves said, in his easy way. "We may have travelled together, dined close to each other—one never knows."

"It seems—something more familiar than that," said Begbie slowly.

As they jogged along to the next covert, hopes and thoughts of finding, the usual fox-hunters' surmises, were lost in the all-pervading topic of the burglaries. They were rich people down in Middle-



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As they jogged along to the next covert, hopes and thoughts of finding, the usual fox-hunters' surmises, were lost in the all-pervading topic of the burglaries. They were rich people down in Middle-

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

shire, with solid things of worth which they did not want to lose.

Lady Julia Greville, a pretty little woman, was almost in tears over her brooches and rings.

"I was tired and sleepy, and just flung them on my dressing-table. Hill, my maid, was away for the night, and now Jim's sent the diamonds to the bank and bought two terriers, and they yap all night, and we live in abject terror. The man got in so cleverly, by the back entrance; there are traces of muddy feet there. It's got glass panels, and he cut one out. Now Lucy Grant sleeps on her rubies, Dickie parades the house with dogs and revolvers, and the stupid police find innumerable clues, and never do anything. If no one catches this man, we shall all become hysterical from strain."

Lady Julia was only one of many. The big houses round Claxton were on the alert. Every stir at night brought men and women pattering down stairs in assorted garments. The tale of the Revel-stones' butler, unable to find his trousers, plunging legs together into his bolster case, and hopping sack-race fashion down the stairs, was not easily to be forgotten.

Men argued and proffered solutions, and wished they were in the criminal department for five minutes, as men will.

General Devine wanted a cordon round his house. Mr. Atherston thought there ought to be a system of electric alarms running to the police stations. Reeves listened, a faint smile on his lips. "It

sounds like the Cracksman's work," he said thoughtfully.

"The who?" Violet asked.

"The Cracksman. A burglar whose methods I've—well, heard of. They call him that because he can get through anything."

"You knew a lot of funny people in your colony," said Violet. "And you'd heaps of money, I suppose?"

"We never wanted any where I was." He looked at her with one of his flashes of silent laughter.

"How nice! I wish I never wanted any," Violet sighed.

Just ahead a humped and dejected back represented Floyd. His engagement, but a day old, was not proving a success. Violet showed him no new softness, and held out no hopes of her wicked little heart turning to him because she was to be his wife. She wore his splendid diamond ring, she had already lightly accepted a present of his motor car; but she laughed at him, snubbed, as unmercifully as if she never meant to put her hand in his and her life into his keeping. Floyd rode well, yet not well enough to please his elegant lady. He was no dasher away over the blackest places, no thruster to come out at locked gates or brooks in flood; but a man who rode his own line quietly, who knew what hounds were doing, and picked his spot in a bad fence with care, and who saw the ends of hunts, when the wild men Violet admired were walking their hurt horses homewards.

Her empty little head was full of schemes and

regrets. If Reeves never wanted money he must be an eccentric millionaire, and why had she not met him before dullness and necessity had made her accept Freddie.

Floyd pulled back just then, they were turning from the road to the covert, a straggling wood on the side of a hill, with a fair country all round.

"Ride the hunt with me, Vi," he said wistfully.

"You never get away, Freddie. You will go round to avoid the crowd in the gate," she said wistfully.

"It's quicker—it really is. I say, don't-cher-know," said Floyd eagerly. "I did well last time—better than your crowd."

"Only because I—we got stuck."

"In the gate?" suggested Freddie unwisely.

"Certainly not," said Violet, flushing hotly. "I'll—let me follow you, Mr. Reeves."

The smile, the wide, appealing eyes were sheer misery to her humble lover.

"I think I shall follow Captain Floyd myself," said Reeves softly. "If he'll allow me. I don't know the country, and I share his horror of crowds."

The ensuing chuckle was an example of Freddie Floyd's lack of discretion. Miss Violet, in a hot fury, left them both. Just then a long-drawn note in covert told them a fox was at home. No ringing brute this, but a straight-necked, grey-flecked customer, who slipped away almost before the whips were in their places, and pointed his mask for Drayton woods, five miles away; there were rabbit holes there which no keeper could stop, and the





## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

ripple and swing of strong sloping shoulders in front of him; the twist of strong quarters as they jumped, the rush of cool, sweet air in his heated face. Evil and sorrow and tribulation are carpet knights and cannot ride a fox-hunt. They dropped away, beaten funklers, and the tired man galloped in a clean world where they were not, and he was only Ernest Reeves, alive, and able to enjoy himself. Yet once, as they flew the last trench the trio blew their poisoned breath at him. He looked down. "If one might die now—in the joy of this," he said simply, swinging the mare to the right.

But death is an epaure in sorrows, choosing his own sordid medicine-haunted moments. The swift release with the good horse beneath and hounds running hard beside is for the favoured of the gods. Drayton woods. A black line two miles away. Unless they tired him out before then the grey fox would save his brush. There were fields of plough now and trappy overgrown banks. Tired horses blundering among the lacing brambles. A horse brushed by Reeves, flying the fence he was creeping on to. He saw it was Evelyn Gervaise on her chestnut horse.

"Steady him," he cried.  
"I can't," she cried back, and he came up beside her. The chestnut was white with lather, but evidently fresh, he tossed his ugly head, raking at his bits. Reeves saw the girl could neither turn nor stop the horse.  
"It's only Providence which has brought me so," she cried out as they galloped on. "I got a



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fall together in a ghastly heap—of striking hoofs and rolling horses? His brains were quicker than that. The grey mare was wrenched to a stand, almost falling into the hedge. Reeves sprang down, and with uplifted whip rushed straight at the pulling chestnut brute, thundering down at him. The whip struck and the horse swerved, only to rush sideways, his vicious eyes maddened now, at the silver line. But the swerve, momentarily as it was, had given the man time; he caught the bridle close to the bits, wrenching them—was carried on, battered by swinging shoulders and forelegs, and pulled the horse up two yards from the wire.

"Get down now," he said, as he found his breath again.

The girl slipped from the saddle, swaying a little, her face white and drawn. They peered over the hedge.

"There is another ditch and wire beyond it, outside," he said quietly. "It would have been a nasty fall."

"You're not hurt?" she muttered, as she watched him changing saddles, he had put the bridles into her hands.

"I? Oh no! A little bruised." But he inspected and there was blood on his hands.

"And—it was your part to save me," she said dully, as he put her up and they rode on to the wood. Some men had pulled up to see if the two were safe, and when they reached the edge of the wood where the grey fox was snugly ensconced in the network of burrows, they were surrounded by eager questioners.



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Evie, but I'd like to be presented, with all your jewels on, just for once."

"My chains of diamonds and rubies," half whispered Evelyn. "Oh, they'll be very gorgeous. Vi. Here's a letter I've forgotten to post about them. A man is bringing down unset stones, boxes of them, for me to choose designs from. Wonderful stones, which he, Harold"—she brought out the name slowly—"has been collecting for years. They'll be something to see, those jewels of mine, on my wedding-day. I think," she laughed drearily, "that Harold dreams of their flash and glitter, of heads turned, and whispers of amazement, and but very little of the human show-case he has chosen. His heart is wrapped up in his stones. He spent two years, he tells me, in buying this blue diamond."

"And the silly old thing looks like an excited sapphire. Oh, it's only envy, Evie. Of course I wish it was mine. Well"—she flung on some logs, holding her pretty hands to the blaze—"there are the burglaries, and Mr. Reeves coming, all in one week."

Evelyn turned whiter; she clutched her bruised hands until they hurt her.

"He"—Violet put her fluffy head on one side—"he's tremendously interesting, Evie, and so mysterious. There's something unfathomable behind those eyes of his. He looks as if he had been to the other world and seen a ghost, and can't forget it. I'm sure, you know, he's an eccentric millionaire."

Violet tapped her tight high-heeled shoes on the fender; one could not imagine her naturally slender

feet in anything except a shoe just half a size too small for her. The delight of saying "I take threes" made up for countless surreptitious aches.

"He's delightful, Evie—so clever. Now, poor Freddie——"

"What would you feel like," said Evelyn quickly, "if Freddie ceased to be a faithful dog?"

"If Freddie ceased——" Violet's eyes grew wide. Life without Freddie to walk after her, without Freddie to jeer at and mock, to bring her books, flowers, tireless sympathy, and get laughed at for his pains—there were things impossible to think of, and this was one of them.

"I suppose I should miss him," she said thoughtfully.

"Think of it sometimes, for you try him very highly," said Evelyn gravely. "There are foolish men on earth, Violet, whom clever men might envy."

She leant back then lost in thought, gazing dreamily at the huge log fire as it leapt and crackled, flinging up flames of orange and blue and yellow, its glowing heart red gold and full of strange, mysterious shapes. Here a castle stood, with battlement and tower, then faded in a second's space to blackness, and fell away. There a landscape all in rosy light; here again a face. There were wonderful things in that fire-world—castles in the fire and air. The girl's mind went back to the past—a past charred and black as a piece of wood which had fallen out and grown cold. She recalled those old happy days when the world was full of trust and love and hope, when she was to have

been happy in a simple way, and fretted then, owning at simplicity, longing for the riches and jewels which could never be hers. Her fingers touched the pearls, each one a sphere of perfect milk-white transparency, each one worth a large sum of money, as much perhaps as would have kept her for a year in the dream-life she had missed, better as it was now, she thought; she would live as she had longed to. Heads turning, sibilant whispers: "Mrs. Begbie—look at her jewels. What has she got on to-night—the Bechstein rubies? the blue diamond? the black pearls?" And the poison in the cup, the shadow lurking for her, could be the lean man who would give her these things, and whom she must call husband. Her flesh rebelled against it sometimes. Her iron bands had lost of all their strength. She dreamt again, shudder-

The sudden end of a girl's hopes . . . the crash of exposure, the wound which angered her so madly with its pain, the gulf which poured in black and red between her and her lover. She stood on the edge, and stretched no hand to him; believed nothing save the worst, for there seemed nothing to believe. All the intolerance of youth was in her; she felt it again to have dared to drag herself down to have her name in the papers; and there was her name, and no more—nothing but the horror of watching and reading of the end, which seemed to prove all. Then misdeeds spreading cruel black wings. Her mother's life, the long years when she had to work day and night, that she might earn the right to live, for a

captious old cousin ; those grinding hopeless months in the terrace at Kensington, a terrace which some humorist had named Elm Gardens. The elms were blackened, hopeless things, languishing in iron rings ; the gardens mere strips of rain-lashed mud in winter and sun-baked mud in summer, their faint blades of grass worn away by tireless childish feet. She could shiver still at the hopeless, dreary life, endless in its monotony ; with daily shopping at cheap suburban shops ; daily walks, or long hours spent over dirty library books its only recreation ; with visits, far apart, up to the western world, where she ground envious teeth, and longed her soul out before the barred jewellers' windows. Deep sapphires, cold turquoises, mocking opals, red blooded rubies, meek, alluring pearls—how she loved them all, and shuddered sometimes in impotent anger before a flashing diamond necklace. Was it wickedness to rejoice when old Miss Gervaise grew ill and must go abroad, when she found herself in the sunny South, in a huge and comfortable hotel ? for the crabbed old woman, who had worn out her health in sordid cheapness, would spare nothing now if she might live on. Here she met the Elvertons, and in her cold way grew happier, and here among the gnarled olives her aunt died. There was little for Evelyn, everything had been sunk in an annuity. The savings were enough to keep her for a year or two in comfort, or, if invested, to help her if she took a situation. Evelyn Gervaise chose liberty, she had been caged too long. Helped by the Elvertons, she came in a mild way into society, a cold girl,

numb to love and all feeling, and there, choosing a brooch at Roswell's, met her fate. Begbie was selecting a ruby, one to complete a necklace, and her eyes were glued to the stones they brought out, until at last the girl with her introduced them.

"Begbie, the jewel collector—a widower and millionaire," she whispered "Miss Gervaise let her help you."

By chance, perhaps, she picked out the best ru almost immediately.

The thin, hard-faced man watched her gloat on the stones; then looked after her as she went out. "A regally beautiful woman," he said to himself. "What a neck for diamonds!" And he wrote to his girl friend, asking them to luncheon.

So Evelyn's match was made. She never thought of hesitating when, in his cold way, the man proposed to her. She wanted to be rich, and fate had given her her heart's desire. Yet she sighed now, very bitterly, looking at a little golden cottage which sprang up in the fire's heart.

If Reeves told his story, showed the mad letters she had written, it would be at an end. Let things work out as they would, she must hold to her future. She could not help herself.

Cold and self-contained, she turned to look at Begbie as he came stiffly into the room.

"I cannot imagine," he said thoughtfully, "why Mr. Reeves's face is so familiar to me, Evelyn. I seem to recall it, and yet he assures me we never met."

"It is, as he says, a common type," Evelyn

answered nervously. Reeves had changed—shaved off his moustache; yet what if he were recognised? She shivered sharply in her fear.

"He is rather a curious person," said Begbie, ruminating. "This hermit's life at Barham is surely a very strange thing. Why should he desire so much to be alone?"

Why! Evelyn felt herself grow hot and cold. Conviction was forcing itself upon her; she feared her fiancé's cold, well-balanced mind, his powers of perception.

"The burglar will be well advised if he stays away from here," laughed Violet, taking a bunch of roses carelessly from Freddie. "You'd follow him to the ends of the earth, Mr. Begbie, if he took Evie's blue diamond?"

"If he took my blue diamond"—the personal pronoun was faintly accented—"he would be a fool," said Begbie. "No one would dare to buy so well known a stone. The extraordinary thing is how a stranger can be about this little place without being noticed."

"Red roses—Freddie, and a yellow gown," Violet was pleased to be petulant. "Put them in water, like a dear."

Floyd, who had wired to town for flowers for her, took them, sighing. "They can burn," he said; but Evelyn caught his hand. "I'll take them," she said. It was one of his rare flashes of temper, resulting in Violet calling him an owl, and immediately pinning on the flowers.

She had done it more to attract attention than

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because she really disliked the velvety, fragrant flowers. Cheap notoriety appeals to a small soul. To wade against the stream and see the ripples silver in the sunshine and feel the current's cold drag was sweeter than quiet sailing with the stream. Violet possessed a way of saying smart things because they were smart, and not because she meant them. A raised eyebrow, a shocked face, was joy to her naughty little heart. An over-sailed, jaunty racer, which wanted a steadier hand than Freddie's upon the rudder to steer it across life's waves. Yet perhaps the steadier hand might have grown impatient of swerves and ducks and dangerous delays in answering the helm, whereas this patient steersman bore duckings from bitter cold waves, buffetings from strong winds, and thought always hopefully of the hour when he would win haven and see his boat ride quiet in peaceful waters.

Susie Elverton came down then, chattering of nothing, as she always did.

"What if Freddie should grow tired?" Violet remembered the words as she crushed in her fragrant flowers. Would any one else suit her quite as well?

"It was so like you, Freddie, not to ask me what colour I wanted," she said flippantly.

"I only remembered you wanted flowers, Vi," he said patiently. "One forgets a woman's a chameleon in matters of dress."

"Mr Reeves," said the butler.

Coming in quietly, looking about him with the same curiously absorbed look he had worn the day before, as if the atmosphere, the shaded lights,

the harmony of colours would have contented him without anything else, Reeves touched a rose-coloured chair softly, he looked at a vase of flowers, before he came on to shake hands and talk over the day.

"Your house is so strangely beautiful, Lady Elverton," he said, almost wistfully.

"Very like so many other houses," she said, smiling, with the Saxon's knack of cheapening her possessions, in hopes she might hear them still further praised.

"Yes, but when one has not been in a house for years," he said, with the inward flash of humour which lighted up his worn face, "eternal lack of colour, all things for sheer use and not one for the lust of the eye, starve a man's soul."

"Good heavens! Why not have sent to Liberty's for Persian rugs?" said Violet the practical. "Australia's not the end of the earth, Mr. Reeves."

"Funny thing, we never thought of Persian rugs," he said, smiling; and Evelyn's fan snapped across in her tense fingers.

"You rich people sit on stools and grate your feet on bare boards," Violet flashed, "while poor ones—— Good gracious! what on earth has Evie done?"

Broken priceless ivory, torn historical lace. The frail sticks had fluttered in a queen's bejewelled fingers. Anne of Austria was supposed to have cooled her handsome face with the tiny toy—played with it perhaps when her sad heart went out to



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Buckingham. Begbie was straightening the curtain sticks, fingering the torn lace in a most distressing way.

"I cannot understand your roughness, Evelyn. You must have wrenched it in both hands. It was almost priceless from its associations, and you promised to be careful with it."

Evelyn was coldly penitent, as she handed him the broken fan. An undercurrent of strong emotion had made her clench her hands and tear without thought at what they held. With all this endless questioning, Reeves would slip, and stand revealed among them. And then—Harold Begbie's ferret's nose had not been given to him for nothing—she knew the lean, dry man would never rest until he found out every detail, and knew what part she had played in the tragic little drama.

Dinner was a merry meal, eaten at a round table, where the cut-off corners so often seem to remove the stiffness of the ordinary English dinner-party.

But to the silent, handsome woman it was a ordeal of fear, with each course bringing her nearer discovery. While to the quiet man near her it was a flash of ghosts, a table which had sprung from the dead past, with every well cooked dish, every glass of sparkling golden wine—a memory—taking him back, telling him the bit out of his life was a dream, and he would wake, see all these faces, save one, change, and know with the glorious relief of stepping, sweating, from nightmare to wakefulness, that he was at home again, with a man's ordinary trusting brain and heart within

him, and not the scared, bitter things, withered to utter hopelessness, which ached there now.

"My dear Mr. Reeves, why say impossible when I ask you if you like snipe?"

He woke with a stab of jarring pain. No, the past was there, black and unchangeable, shutting him off from the lives of ordinary men; and the present was with him. The man he had dreamt of lay dead, and the scarecrow they had built from his blood and bones was sitting here, a being made of brass and iron, with nothing good about him.

"Forgive me, Miss St. Maur, I was far away, dreaming. Yes, I love snipe, and—butterflies," he added softly, looking at her glowing face; and Freddie plumped his glass down so sharply that the wine in it upset, splashing his startled hostess. Violet fluttered and blushed, flashing soft looks at Reeves. A colonial millionaire—who knew what might happen?

Harold Begbie detested chattering women. He had certainly no fault to find with his fiancée, who sat beside him like an icicle, merely answering when she was spoken to, and that but absently.

Having absorbed the plainly cooked meats and sago pudding and prunes, which was all his digestion allowed him, he tried to interest her as to the setting of her wedding jewels—the wonderful combination which was to set the world talking.

"A string of coloured diamonds, Evelyn, joined with black pearls—I think that would astonish people not a little. Yellow and other blues, and pink; that last took me two years to get, and the

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French Countess was desperate before she let it  
What do you think, Evelyn?

"It would be admirable," she said dully.

"With the Grant Lacy stone for the centre of  
your tiara. We must have a little colour in it to  
show up the white stones—diamonds alone always  
seem to be a mere blaze of light with half their  
beauty unseen. Emeralds, or sapphires—they  
would go best with your hair. And for a neck-  
lace— The others were eating cunning mix-  
tures of sardines and anchovies and eggs. The sage  
pudding had left Begbie's plate barren, until he  
ate two dates of orange so he mounted his hobby  
and rode it hard. "For a necklace Evelyn—

"Diamonds, of course. Reeves leant across  
"Diamonds and a white brocade dress. You hold  
us spellbound here Begbie with your Muddins  
palace of jewels. Are you never afraid of being  
robbed?

"Never! Begbie chuckled dully. "There are  
I believe so many ways of getting into England  
and no way out. I repaid England. A man  
ought force my windows at my door. He found him-  
self the centre of a dozen whirling circles during  
the long night of my struggle and there nearly  
every jewel in my house with an electric current  
"But Evelyn— and Reeves. Mrs. Reeves  
saw the famous blue diamond, those pearls, a  
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I keep these jewels in my own room.

in a safe, and my terrier, Toby, is as good as electricity."

"Terriers may die of arsenic, of prussic acid; chloroform would keep you quiet, Begbie; and a man might risk the hangman for a few of your glittering toys. The Claxton burglar may be listening now, powdering poor Toby's last piece of food, fingering the little bottle which will keep you still while the drill whines and bites into your steel safeguard. Oh, I'd be careful, Begbie, down here."

He leant back, smiling. Begbie, taking a little more barley-water, eyed him sourly. Why should his peace of mind be disturbed in this fashion? and where had he seen the man's face before?

"You'll tell us you are the burglar yourself next, Mr. Reeves," he said stiffly. "You work up alarms so well."

"I might, even that—even that," laughed Reeves.

"Brr! My dear Evelyn, are your hands fated to-night?" Begbie sprang up, scrubbing at his dress clothes, for Evelyn, helping herself to ginger, had let the spoon fall, and the oozy sweetness of the juice dropped where it would.

"Ginger syrup, of all things!" The jewel collector, who would spend thousands upon a coveted stone, spoke of the cleaner's bill with open irritation.

"You don't look at all well, Evie." Kindly Susie Elverton looked at the pale, still girl with some anxiety. "You're so white, and you look frightened. I must send old Jones round to-morrow."

"To give her a bromide pill," Violet laughed.

"It was that horse to-day, Auntie—he wore her

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

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 robbed ? "

" Never ! " Begbie chuckled drily " There are,  
 I believe, so many ways of getting into England,  
 and no way out. I represent England. A man  
 might force my windows or my den, he d find him-  
 self the centre of a dozen whurring electric alarms  
 before he got into my strong room, and there nearly  
 every jewel-case connects with an electric current "

" But here . . " said Reeves " Miss Gervaise  
 wears the famous blue diamond, those pearls, a  
 priceless emerald. Here——" He met Evelyn's  
 horror-stricken eyes, saw her throat work and her  
 lips grow dry

" Here I keep these jewels in my own room,

in a safe, and my terrier, Toby, is as good as electricity."

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"It would be admirable," she said dully.

"With the Grant Lacy stone for the centre of your tiara. We must have a little colour in it to show up the white stones—diamonds alone always seem to be a mere blaze of light with half their beauty unseen. Emeralds, or sapphires—they would go best with your hair. And for a necklace——" The others were eating cunning mixtures of sardines and anchovies and eggs. The sage pudding had left Begbie's plate barren, until he ate two dates or an orange, so he mounted his hobby and rode it hard. "For a necklace, Evelyn——"

"Diamonds, of course." Reeves leant across. "Diamonds, and a white brocade dress. You hold us spellbound here, Begbie, with your Aladdin's palace of jewels. Are you never afraid of being robbed?"

"Never!" Begbie chuckled drily. "There are, I believe, so many ways of getting into England, and no way out. I represent England. A man might force my windows or my den; he'd find himself the centre of a dozen whurring electric alarms before he got into my strong-room, and there nearly every jewel-case connects with an electric current."

"But here?" said Reeves. "Miss Gervaise wears the famous blue diamond; those pearls, a priceless emerald. Here——" He met Evelyn's horror-stricken eyes, saw her throat work and her lips grow dry.

"Here I keep these jewels in my own room,

in a safe, and my terrier, Toby, is as good as electricity."

"Terriers may die of arsenic, of prussic acid; chloroform would keep you quiet, Begbie; and a man might risk the hangman for a few of your glittering toys. The Claxton burglar may be listening now, powdering poor Toby's last piece of food, fingering the little bottle which will keep you still while the drill whines and bites into your steel safeguard. Oh, I'd be careful, Begbie, down here."

He leant back, smiling Begbie, taking a little more barley-water, eyed him sourly. Why should his peace of mind be disturbed in this fashion? and where had he seen the man's face before?

"You'll tell us you are the burglar yourself next, Mr. Reeves," he said stiffly. "You work up alarms so well."

"I might, even that—even that," laughed Reeves.

"Brr! My dear Evelyn, are your hands fated to-night?" Begbie sprang up, scrubbing at his dress clothes, for Evelyn, helping herself to ginger, had let the spoon fall, and the oozy sweetness of the juice dropped where it would.

"Ginger syrup, of all things!" The jewel collector, who would spend thousands upon a coveted stone, spoke of the cleaner's bill with open irritation.

"You don't look at all well, Evie." Kindly Susie Elverton looked at the pale, still girl with some anxiety. "You're so white, and you look frightened. I must send old Jones round to-morrow."

"To give her a bromide pill," Violet laughed. "It was that horse to-day, Auntie—he wore her



out. Come, Evie. Auntie's off. Mr. Begbie's coat will clean—why worry?"

There was no formal sitting of womankind at Claxton—they went into the card-room to smoke and play bridge. Begbie, at certain points, was an enthusiast, a player who never lost a trick from lack of calculation or counting cards, and never gained one, or saved a game, by taking a risk.

But he was still thinking of his jewels to-night. A certain nervousness made him restless.

The blue diamond, the pearls, would all go back to London to-morrow. They were wasted down here, and the thought of the sickly sweetness of chloroform, or strong fingers on his throat, would obtrude themselves unpleasantly.

"They remind me," he turned to his hostess. "I have never yet seen your emeralds, and the centre stone is, they tell me, flawless. You said you would wear them to-night."

"But I couldn't," said Lady Elverton, plaintively. "Marvin put out one of my yellow gowns, and it was impossible. You can give your wife jewels for every coloured gown. My emeralds are my only possession. I love yellow, and it's so awkward. Mustard and——"

"Cress," suggested Reeves gravely.

"Of course—mustard and cress," she assented, laughing.

"White brocade and diamonds sound better," said Reeves.

"Still harping upon that string," Evelyn whispered to him.

"The string which bound me—yes."

"But if you want to see the emeralds, Mr. Begbie," went on Lady Elverton, "it's quite simple. Would you ring, Freddie? Twice, for my maid."

"Oh, Mr. Reeves," Violet came flitting along, her pretty face full of mischievous content. "I've some photographs in the boudoir; I'd love to show them to you. Come along, before we start bridge."

Freddie's second peal upon the bell partook of the nature of a cornet solo, well sustained. He did not remove his finger as he stared jealously at Violet.

Marvin, a discreet and somewhat comely maid, came quietly in.

"You rang for me, m'lady?"

"Mr. Begbie wants to see the emeralds, Marvin. Here is the key."

"The key of the strong-room, Lady Elverton," said Reeves. "What a responsibility."

"Not of a strong-room—of my jewel-case. You couldn't put a strong-room where I keep that," said her ladyship.

"And that is——" He paused at the door.

A chair went over with a crash, jarring against a card-table in its fall.

"Good Lord, Evelyn! You do seem fated to-night," said Begbie irritably. "There was absolutely no reason for upsetting that chair."

"There may have been a fancied one," Reeves picked the chair up. "I think I see it. Oh! coming, Miss St. Maur—coming!"

"Wait a second, Vi." Lady Elverton was fidget-

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

ing with a little box. "I want to show Mr. Begbie these ivories, and the key's gone. Have you got it?"

"No," said Violet impatiently.

"It's lost then," said the lady dolorously; "and it's a patent lock."

Reeves came to her, taking up the little box. He slipped a wire from his pocket, twisting for a moment, then, with a smile, handed the open box to his hostess.

"So pitifully simple!" he said. "Oh! I'm really coming now."

He followed Violet St. Maur.

Evelyn Gervaise stood still, staring after him. He was gone—that was something. She breathed more easily, trying to laugh at herself, calling herself a fool, hardly daring to think of what she feared.

"My dear Evelyn, you seem dreadfully upset to-night," Begbie's dry, precise tones roused her, making her pull her frightened face into more ordinary lines. "May I ask what happened?"

He peered at her through her glasses.

"The chair—fell," she murmured.

"Dear me. How careless! I thought, to be precise, that you were sitting upon it, Evelyn, ye you did not fall."

"No; as you see," she said with a wintry smile.

"It was only the chair. Look at Freddie, Harold—he's just like a beetle on a pin as he squirms there."

"I have never, to be precise, seen a beetle on a pin," observed Begbie, looking mildly at Freddie.

And that moment Freddie's mind, which squirmed more actively than his body, made itself up. The photographs were "No. 2 Brownies," but the boudoir was over cosy. *His* ring was upon Violet's finger; *he* was engaged to that wilful piece of humanity, and a future husband has his rights. With an assumption of dignity which he was far from feeling he strutted from the room.

"Evelyn." Begbie spread his coat-tails, tucked up his trouser legs, and sat down woodenly. "You know I particularly dislike the fashion in which they abbreviate your name here, Evelyn."

"Oh, yes." She could not veil the irritation in her voice.

"This is Monday. Grant and a detective will bring the box here for you to look into Friday, since you do not care to go up to London. There are treasures there, Evelyn, which I have never shown. I thought if you had a piece of your wedding-gown here, a slip of the white brocade——"

"Satin," she said, in stifled tones.

"Dear me! Precisely. I thought we had decided on brocade—lustrous, and such a background! We must have something wonderful, Evelyn"—he rubbed his thin, dry hands together. "What about an arrangement of opals and pearls and diamonds to edge the bodice, then the black and coloured chain . . . but we will see . . . I hope the papers will write it all up. You will become the stones well, my dear." This faint lapse into gallantry

made her shiver. There was a price to be paid for it all—coined in blood, and stamped with vain regret. "They will be written of as 'Mrs. Begbie's wedding jewels.'"

"Mrs. Beghie's wedding jewels?" she repeated in a whisper.

"The gift of her husband. I am a rich man, Evelyn. I doubt if royalty, except, of course, India's princes, will boast of finer possessions than yours. Quantity will not give them unique jewels such as I've slaved to gather. And I have sold others which I did not want, at large profits, paying for some of these. It's not altogether an extravagance."

The girl had fallen into thought, her head resting upon her hand. Her arm, white and shapely, showed its young, soft contours. Curved about above the elbow was a flexible jewelled snake, a barbaric thing flaming with uncut heavy stones—the tongue, red and flexible, lolled out against the creamy flesh.

"That is a fine example of Indian work," he said. "I bought it from a soldier's widow—it was loot, no doubt. Some people say these things are poisoned. Oh, by the way, Evelyn, where did you say you met Mr. Reeves?"

"At a ball." Her eyes were fixed on vacancy. "Oh, no, he was—not there," she said, in a low, deep voice.

"At a ball at which he was not. My dear Evelyn, a curious statement." He looked at her sus-

"I beg your pardon, Harold, I was thinking." She recalled her attention with a nervous start. "We met, as I told you, years ago. It was not sufficiently important to impress itself upon me."

Well acted, Evelyn! It deceived the man who was studying her curiously.

"Of course not—precisely. The man annoys me, Evelyn. He is a curious mixture—can I say?—of discrepancies; there is nothing precise or definite about his statements. When I question him about the colonies, I cannot pin him down. Turnbareenbers and Bangoolas are all too common to be picked out. His coming here seems to be in itself curious—this hermuting, to coin a word—a strange idea."

"Why?" Her voice was steady, but one hand was pressed hard against her left side. "The hunting is fair; the society is pleasant; the house cheap. I—have forgotten a letter which must go early to-morrow, Harold; I'll go and write it." She went out slowly, a tall, stately figure, passing him with a rustle of silk, a faint whiff of perfumed lace at the door.

"Most suitable," he said, coming back to the fire, rubbing his hands together. They were so dry, they grated harshly; so thin, the joints cracked. "A regal woman who will suit me well," he went on.

Lady Elverton, half asleep in her corner, watched him with distaste.

"I couldn't! For the Roc's egg—for the Koh-i-noor," she said to herself. "No, I could not marry Harold Begbie!"

"The emeralds, m'lady." Marvin came in with a flat box and opened it, standing waiting.

It was a noble necklace of magnificent stones—a ripple of green fire—and the stone in the pendant a flawless example of the jealous-hued gem. The depth of the sea close to the cliffs seemed caught in its pure and perfect hues. Harold Begbie bent over it with a little gasp of dismay.

"I have nothing which touches it; each link is a fortune," he said, almost desolately. "Nothing! The value is enormous."

"An' keeps one awake o' nights," said Marvin suddenly. "Since all these robberies I cannot rest, sir; they're worth a king's ransom, them stones, and her ladyship won't send them to the bank, to be safe."

Tormented by her doubts, Evelyn Gervase had written a few lines to a shop, and came slowly back, her face white and miserable. She saw Marvin, and the case in Begbie's hands, and looked round for Reeves; he was not there. The temptation of the emeralds would not be laid before him.

"Evelyn!" Begbie looked up. "These are magnificent. Be careful never to wear emeralds when Lady Elverton is about and wears hers—that is, until I procure a similar stone, if it is possible."

"I shall remember," she said absently.

Reeves came quietly in through the open door, going to the table, on which there was a book of photographs. Gathered about the jewels, no one heard or noticed him, and he stood to look and listen.

"The centre stone, my dear lady"—Begbie let the light fall on the beautiful stones—"is worth a fortune."

"A fortune," murmured Ernest Reeves softly, a bitter look on his face.

"Not like my blue diamond, a thing marked; this could be stolen and sold. And you actually keep these in an ordinary jewel-case?" said Begbie, in shocked tones. "It's madness!"

"It's for safety's sake," said Susie Elverton, laughing. "The case is carefully bundled away in my wardrobe under the tails of my dresses. What burglar would think of looking there?"

Reeves, standing still, nodded his head and smiled.

"I have never in my life, even in great collections, seen a stone to equal this," said Begbie enviously. "For Heaven's sake send the necklace to the bank."

"To the bank? Of course!" Sir Henry, bustling in, caught the last word. "I'm always talking to Susie about it, Begbie."

"But I like wearing them, Henry," said Susie Elverton piteously. "I have that mauve dress for them now, and two white ones. The bank manager wouldn't get any pleasure out of the stones."

A thunder-cloud in blue came flouncing to the door—Violet, exceedingly annoyed by desertion.

"Mr. Reeves, why did you not come back? Couldn't you find the book? . . . You've got it in your hand."



## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

Evelyn Gervaise started round, her grey eyes aflame. How long had he been there? Marvin, taking the case, went out, looking sorrowfully at her charge. "They lie heavy on my chest m'lady," she said lugubriously.

"I'm sorry, Miss St. Maur. Your directions were not explicit," muttered Reeves. "I got mixed."

"Oh, that reminds me " Why, Lady Elverton might have found it hard to explain. "Sir Henry and I have been talking things over. Until your servants arrive, you must stay here for a few days, Mr. Reeves. You really must."

He looked up hesitating, an almost longing look in his eyes. Evelyn came slowly across, until she was close beside him, her back to the others as she bent over the table.

"How long were you in here? You must not come to stay," she shot out.

The smile on his face might have warned her. "So—you think," he laughed; then raised his

voice. "Thank you very much, Lady Elverton. It's more than you think to me, and I shall be delighted," he said quietly.

"You must not!" whispered Evelyn frantically.

"I'll tell them."

"Take care, Evie," he said very smoothly, as he went across to the bridge-tables.

## CHAPTER V

### A NARROW ESCAPE

**B**AD weather had descended upon Claxton. Storms of icy rain lashed the sodden earth, driven up by bitter south-east winds. Inky masses of clouds seemed to march in interminable ragged-edged array across a sullen under-sky of storm-torn grey.

Hunting was a test of stolid endurance; of standing shivering behind the fictitious shelter of bare hedgerows; diving down in hollows to gain a moment's respite from the whip of the bitter wind; watching with scant hope—after the thrill of the find, the momentary hustling warmth of the start—hounds at fault on the sodden cold ground, where any straight-necked fox could run them out of scent; splashing through pools and sheets of grey water; sliding off the slippery banks.

The Thursday following Reeves's dinner at Claxton was the coldest day they had had; the wind came moaning and howling, mourning for the burden of rain upon its back; squalls of rain lashed down almost incessantly. To leave the shelter of hedge and

w, and jog out against the full chill of the blast  
it bent heads and a shiver such as your timid  
r gives when he slips into the cold sea.

nds grew numb and swollen, woollen gloves  
soon sodden, wet trickled in at elbows and  
. And Reeves, with half-powerless fingers  
ng on the reins, was trying to ride Begbie's  
chestnut, and had put Evelyn on his grey. They  
one home so early on the Tuesday that horses  
quite fit to come out again.

elyn had not wanted to change, but, finding  
saddle shifted at the meet, could think of no  
a for refusing, so got up dully, and found it  
sible not to love the little Irish mare—the  
t mouth bending to the light word, the  
y action, the great heart in the grey, ap-  
t in her every movement. What if her backs  
ired and a big bump stood on her off fetlock?  
hundred guineas' worth might be unblemished,  
ould be no better to ride.

chestnut was sullen to-day. The quiet,  
ful hands on his bridle cowed him for a time;  
he stood with drooping head and laid-back  
Reeves could feel the devil in the horse only  
red. There is something about a vicious  
which one cannot mistake—it may go  
; carry one well; yet the uneasiness, the under-  
below the placid surface, is there, and one  
it.

ie, very blue and pinched, and rather re-  
at being dragged out, watched the horse  
hantly.

"I told you it was only because Miss Gervaise did not understand the animal. I thought she was a fine rider," he said. "I do not think, Reeves, I shall accept your offer of an exchange."

"Which perhaps, after to-day, I may not renew." Reeves sat on one numb hand to warm it, and saw the watchful lean head go up and the restless eye turn on him. "I think the horse is a confirmed runaway, Begbie, and some one could tell us his story."

"He is behaving absolutely quietly," said the chestnut's owner, in huffed tones—"on so cold a day too. Good weather for our burglar, this, Reeves; yet he is resting, or has gone away. Harding of Scotland Yard comes down to-day."

"Yes." Reeves sat up, and the chestnut started and winced. The spurs had grazed him. "He will not come to Claxton, I suppose?"

"No, I should not say so. This is blank, and they are moving on. Lord! how bitter this wind is!"

It howled along the stretch of road, crinkling the sullen pools; whimpering among the bare thorns; bending and torturing branches of trees; flinging, even in dry intervals, showers of cold drops down upon justly aggrieved faces.

A little coster-cart drawn by a wiry pony came rattling by, the man looking up at the chilled riders who splashed by him. As he neared Reeves he stared harder; then, pulling up his cart, bent down to one of his market-baskets as though the contents had been disturbed.

"Remarkably industrious little man that—set up

a garden here a month ago," said Sir Henry jogging off, his bluff face defying the cold. "Cam to see how to grow geraniums for sale yesterday, and brought us a basket of mushrooms—his own growing."

Reeves turned to look at the cart and its bending driver.

"Mushrooms! He grew them quickly," he said thoughtfully.

"Some new French method. Yes. Here we are at Bramstone Heights, and of all places for such a day!"

The covert was a snug patch of wood, but standing on the top of a long slope which they had been gradually winding up. Beyond the wood there was a long stretch of barren, unfenced land, cut across by disused quarries. Some were marked by rotting posts and rails, others by nothing at all. For the stretch of upland was in dispute, and no man's land to look after. If a fox broke across the bare, poor hillside, it was usual for the field to take to one of the old cart-tracks, and not risk galloping hard across the dangerous open. It was a remote contingency, there were several coverts to the east, where they had come from, and none for five miles or more along the hill. Yet sometimes a fox broke that way, threading his way among the quarries, and making for a wood half-way down the hill.

"It would be down-wind along the hill to-day," said Floyd, nodding at the bare ridge. "Just our luck if we went that way, slap away from home,

and among those quarry holes. I hate galloping on the cart-track."

"Yoo-oo." A long-drawn note in covert, confirmed and echoed until cold wind and bitter rain were all forgotten. Hounds crashed through the thick undergrowth, hot on their fox. He lopped the fence at the windward side, met a lashing squall, and, dodging back, broke straight along the ridge of the hill, keeping in shelter. A mile or so away came the first of the old quarries, and then for another two they were everywhere, marked and unmarked.

Down-wind, once out on the bare cold land, scent was of the catchiest. Hounds hunted slowly, after one quick burst, when they were almost in view.

The long unfenced slope, the constant checks, soon tired the chestnut's resting temper. He raked at his powerful bits, until his neck was white with foam, and Reeves's hand grew red and sore beneath his soaked gloves.

Plunging in great bounds, he could feel the brute was only waiting his time, when one reach, more powerful than before, would get his head down, and with the bits between his teeth he could defy his rider.

Reeves did not know of the quarries; on the contrary, he thought with a grim smile that he might make the chestnut sorry before he stopped him on that long reach of hill. He kept back in the crowd, knowing a bolter is often deterred by the sight of horses close in front of him.

Evelyn, on the grey, was riding well ahead to the right, keeping up the hill, ready for the time

when they would take to the safeness of the old, scarcely visible cart-tracks. It was comparatively warm there, with the wind's whip shut away, and intermittent cantering to stir chilled blood.

"We'll make nothing of it, I fear." The master eyed his puzzled pack as they spread out on a piece of stony ground.

"Get on there, Reveller! 'Ware—heel!" the whip's lash curled out at a retrospective hound who, as he could make nothing of it on, was hunting quietly back by himself. "Get on there, Reveller!"

The long lash singing out missed Reveller, and flicked the chestnut horse lightly on the quarter. It was his opportunity . . . he plunged forward madly again and again, then finding the strain on his bits unrelaxed, the man on him unshaken, he reared straight up, higher and higher. Reeves dropped the reins then, slipping his feet from the stirrups lest the horse might crash back, and it was enough for the watchful, determined devil between his knees. The chestnut dropped to earth with a forward plunge, caught the bits tight in his teeth, and bolted, with rigid neck and flattened ears, tearing over the short-grassed, stony earth.

Before a man could call out, the horse was through every one, and tearing on, his eyes searching for some tangle of boughs of stretching branch against which he could brush off his rider.

"Oh! bolt, then, as you like it." Reeves dived for his lost stirrups, put his feet home, and held on to the useless reins. There was a stretch

of two miles in front of him; the chestnut should want to stop, and not be able to before he was finished with him. He picked up his whip, and, after a futile effort of sawing and wrenching, hit the brute instead of trying to stop him, rather joining in the wild pace, and the certainty of tiring the runaway out.

Evelyn, riding by herself—Floyd was some distance higher up—heard the shouts, and saw a horse sweeping towards her at a racing pace. She knew it was Begbie's chestnut, bolting this time in earnest. There was no wire to-day, nothing to jump. Why then was the whole hunt waving, screaming, pointing, as one bemaddened man? Some galloped in pursuit and pulled up again, others pointed and turned away, shading their eyes, as if they could not look.

The quarries! Evelyn knew then—she remembered. Man and horse were making straight for the first great pit, an unfenced, unmarked gulf, with a fall of sixty feet to the cruel hewn-away rocks below.

The shouts came dimly to Reeves's ears. He heard them and smiled. When the chestnut stopped again, there would be no runaway left in him. He sat quiet, and let the great brute go.

The quarries! Evelyn knew what the ridge in front meant. A few more hurried seconds, a few more of those great raking strides, and man and horse would pass over the edge to their death. Stricken men would pick up the mangled thing which so lately had been Ernest Reeves, and that would be the end—the end!



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Thoughts flash through a brain at lightning speed. The end—the man would pass from her life as quickly as he had come into it. She would be free again, without haunting fear or hope of discovery, with a quiet life of ease and riches stretching in front of her. And, as it stood now, she too was on the brink of a quarry, on the verge of a fall which would mean ruin to her.

So fast the thoughts flashed as the thundering hoofs came closer, until she could hear the horse's quick breath, see his open scarlet nostrils and white staring eyes; as a demon mad . . . he flew on, master for the time being, beyond control of the hurden he hated, yet with those knees close against his sides, and the quiet hands ready to drag the bits from his clenched teeth at the first chance. The madness of his own speed made him drunk with temper as he rushed on.

They were waving to her now. She alone could warn Reeves. The chestnut was close to her, almost level, and not three hundred yards away rose the hump of green, marking the quarry. The posts were gone.

"Stop!" she shrieked foolishly. "Oh, stop!" Reeves heard and laughed. How like a woman!

He shook his head at her as he rushed by. Gone! Her hands grew numb, her brain dizzy.

Gone without a thought of what that green meant. Making straight for the yawning quarry and she had not warned him to turn up the hill.

Floyd turned his head, heard Evelyn shriek, and saw the runaway rush by. "Good God! the

quarries!" he said. He was above; he could cut off an angle. He dashed down over the stony rough ground, with little grey stones cropping from the surface.

Evelyn, hitting the grey mare, started in pursuit. Too late!

"Stop!" she shrieked. "The quarry!" Her voice was torn away in the pace.

Reeves shook his head again, waving at her to pull up, calling to her sternly, as he saw her strike the little grey.

"Go back! You can do no good. Go back!" he shouted.

She could hear him; he could not hear her. She checked her mare with a groan, and Freddie Floyd came crashing down, spurs rammed in, his thoroughbred flying in astonishment. The men drew level, though some little distance apart, racing together now for the lurking death.

"A race, Floyd, eh?" Reeves hit the maddened devil he bestrode, and laughed; but at Floyd's next words his smile died.

"Get off, man!" Floyd roared to him. "A quarry—just in front! A quarry! Get off, or turn, if there's time, for God's sake!"

"Where?" cried Reeves.

"There—the rise!"

They bore together at it with strides that stole away their span of safety.

"Get off!" the little man yelled. "Oh, can't you hear me? Get off!"

Reeves turned his head. Evelyn was coming

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behind. He might wrench his horse's head round and win clear, but he did not know the place or how wide the quarry was. It grew nearer, and he sat still, fascinated as a bird by a snake's eyes.

"Quick, man, or we'll both be over! Now! Jump! Slip!" Freddie never thought of stopping until he saw the other safe.

Freddie set his teeth and struck the chestnut's nose hard. He checked for a fraction of a second, and with a thud Reeves came hard upon the stony ground—just as Floyd, none too soon, pulled the mare round and up, she stretched her feet out, sliding not twenty yards from the verge, before he stopped her.

The chestnut, relieved of his burden, triumphant, raced on—a mad horse, who knew no stopping. For a moment he was clear cut, a flying thing against the sodden sky. Then he half plunged, a horse's scream of terror rang out, and there was nothing.

It seemed to their tense nerves as if hours elapsed before a dull thud came from far below.

Reeves, standing horseless, looking at that void sky-line, turned slowly to Freddie.

"You are a very fine fellow, Floyd," he said quietly; and their hands met.

"Not at all, don't-cher-know," said Freddie, shamefaced as a schoolboy.

"Another few yards, and you'd have gone down yourself. For me. It might have been an easy solution for me—for you it was madness. I can

only say, 'Thank you, Floyd.' It's a bald language, this English of ours, when men use it."

"Now, did you expect me to sit still and see you made omelettes of?" said Freddie gruffly.

"Or pancakes; but it suffices. You would not stop; and I was dazed. But for you I should be down there dead."

Very pale, with wide, half-dazed eyes, Evelyn came up. "I called, and I was too late," she faltered; for those thoughts of hers were maddening her now, whipping her to bitter repentance.

"I thought you were merely requesting me to pull up my horse," said Reeves, with one of his flashes of silent laughter.

"No other word would come, till you had passed," she muttered, with bent head, deadly ashamed.

"And it might have been an excellent solution. I did not mean that, of course—you called. Evie, don't look like that," he whispered, for her white face was dyed a miserable scarlet, her eyes were piteous.

"Freddie, you are the best man on earth," said Evelyn suddenly.

"Not at all," said Freddie laughily; and the hunt, foxes forgotten, came storming up.

"A near shave, Reeves. We were half mad behind there seeing you thunder to a certain death." Even Sir Henry's ruddy face was white. Freddie, overwhelmed by praise, stood blushing and fidgeting.

"Aren't you proud, Vi, of one of the bravest men on earth?" Sir Henry said.

"One of the bravest men on earth!" Vi looked at small, insignificant Freddie, and a queer lump rose in her throat. "Freddie, why did you go so far? You quite forgot yourself," reproved Violet, more for the sake of speaking than because she meant to be unsympathetic.

"Oh, because, don't-cher-know," he said shyly, "the—Reeves—I had to make him hear."

The girl shrugged her shoulders. After all, he was only Freddie, and no hero.

"It is Floyd's way to forget himself," said Reeves gravely.

Begbie came pushing through the crowd, his thin face anxious. "The chestnut!" he said, looking about him vaguely, unable to believe in the animal's complete disappearance.

Reeves pointed straight ahead, but with an upward sweep of his hand which seemed to indicate the chestnut having gone heavenwards; and Begbie looked vaguely at the lowering clouds, but walked on anxiously.

"Take care, it's a sheer fall," said a voice. Begbie dropped on his knees, peering over. Far down lay a huddled mass of horseflesh, the head extended, with bared teeth; gouts of blood splashed about on the grey stones. Begbie drew back with a little groan.

"So showy an animal, too," he said, adjusting his glasses. "I presume now that I shall have to pay for his removal; or perhaps Captain Gateshead would send for it for the kennels." As the bright idea struck him, he spoke to the master, who had come to peer down too.

"Awful brute. I believe even boiled he'd make the hounds run riot," said Gateshead dryly. "Why on earth did you buy him, Begbie? You might have killed Miss Gervaise; very nearly killed Reeves here."

"It was a most unfortunate purchase, and a great loss to me," said Begbie, drawing back, his thin face set in peevish lines, no thought of his future wife's danger troubling him.

The after-taste of any great excitement is always flat and muddy. Hounds went on dragging at a snail's pace now, for a fresh storm of rain swept up; but none of the Claxton party felt inclined to go farther from home. They were shaken by the occurrence, by the nearness of death to one of them, and they turned to ride back to the road and find Freddie's motor to drive home in. Evelyn was silent as they scrambled down the hill—the rush of those thundering hoofs, her own wild flash of thought, the sickening moment when she believed there was no hope, and then the sudden disappearance of the galloping horse haunted her. She could hear his scream of terror ringing in her ears, and she had hardly known then whether Reeves was really safe upon the ground or over too. If the stirrup had caught, if Freddie had been a second later! The girl was shaken to the depths of her being. Years of distrust and contempt seemed swept away, and she was back again at Dulverton village, with her heart throbbing for the same man. She thought of her nature; the habits of the years reasserted themselves as the car sped humming

homewards. Her look at Reeves when he helped her down was full of coldness and suspicion, all its softness gone. If she could only get him to go away, to leave her and her friends in peace; for she thought what she scarcely dared to put clearly even to herself of him.

He smiled his whimsical, tired smile at her as they went up the wet steps.

"It's a pity you think so much, Evie," he said, "A pity that old habit of intolerance clings to you. Believing the worst sometimes makes the worst, you know."

"And what else am I to believe?" she murmured. "If you would only go away."

"But I won't," he said lightly, "until my purpose is served," and so left her more certain than before of his intention.

When Reeves came down the boudoir was empty. Two people were moving about in the conservatory, and he did not know that it was Bateson come to glean information from the great Mr. McIntock.

The table was laid for six but it had not come in, as the others had not finished changing. He had dressed quickly, and come down fresh from a hot bath, with the delightful feeling of pleasant exhaustion which follows a day in the open air. A basket of mushrooms stood on the table.

"The wonderful garden!" he said thoughtfully, looking at them, they were dried up and

coming in now him looking at them.  
"Her present, sir," volunteered the butler.

"Mr M'Clintock is amazed at them mushrooms, grows 'em in a common frame, I hear, and Mr. M'Clintock never saw anything like it. Bateson is there now, getting hints about geraniums"—he pointed to the figures moving in the dimly lighted conservatory.

"Yes," Reeves nodded.

He dropped into a chair, thinking deeply, wondering at the strange ways of the jade Fate, who had driven him to Claxton, so small a corner of the earth; and to ordain that he should meet Evelyn, the girl he had once been engaged to, with the gulf of muddy years, which for him must mar his life to the end, between them.

He sighed deeply. And to have been met by her with such cold dislike, such open suspicion. Had this woman, then, ceased absolutely to care? The bitter ache at his heart told him that he had not, but he could scarcely analyse the feeling which caused that weary ache—whether it was ache or longing. For the present the warmth and comfort lulled him to a brief period of rest. It was good not to stoop over frying-pans; not to get out one's own bread and butter and tea, and sit alone to it, even with the joy of eating off Worcester and Crown Derby. This was peace and an English home. The storm-clouds might be black beyond the oasis, yet a man could sit still on the green and dream; the wind and rain might never come.

He looked again at the basket of mushrooms. James had just come in with a dish of hot scones,



## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

and another of poached eggs and piles of buttered toast, and even jam: fox-hunters were shamelessly hungry people.

"I must ask that man how he grows those mushrooms, James," and he went to the half-open French window of the conservatory.

Little Bateson, seeing him, gave a sudden gasp, and, seizing a flower-pot, buried himself in the blackest shadow he could find, hiding his face amongst the branches of heliotrope.

"An' now you see Mr Bateson," M'Clintock droned on, believing his pupil close to him.

"Oh, come in, Mr Bateson. You must take tea I'm dying for mine, and I can answer anything then Mr Reeves is here. I think—is he not, James? Come along.

As a better stibbons scouting game, Reeves's face set—he stood listening, one hand pushing the window, the other clenched. Then he drew back slowly in the shadow of a huge palm, and stood listening.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Sir Henry, but as one of the principal magistrates I thought I'd see you. You are most kind." Sir Henry and the London detective—a hard bitten, dark little man—came into the warm, scented room.

M'Clintock droned on expounding geranium culture.

"No strangers about you say," Sir Henry slipped out testily. "No fresh arrivals, except the tenant at Barham."

"A London' man. A personal friend of mine."

## A Narrow Escape

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said Sir Henry. "And the little market garden - See, there are some of his mushrooms."

"I'd no idea he's been here so long. - Oh, I see him, I wonder. I'm a garden expert," said the detective thoughtfully, fingering the mushrooms as Sir Henry gave him tea.

He had then to greet Violet and Evelyn, who came in together, but he seemed queer at his ease.

"Bateson, I believe, is in with my garden now, getting some leaves. Sir Henry handed the cream-jug towards the conservatory. "Where is Mr Bateson James?"

The outer door of the conservatory stood, a black-bearded man peered in a nervous way from room and the Scotland Yard man went in a careless way. "What are you doing?"

"Went to the Barge with a message for Henry," said James, pointing to the door. "Gone back, they have."

"Yes, they appear to have gone for the storm to study the matter," said Violet.

"More tea? Thank you." The Scotland Yard man was very comfortable and enjoyed his water. "It's some one who comes down by train. Sir Henry, without doubt. We must watch at this carefully."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE MONKSHILL MUD

FREDDIE FLOYD sat hunched upon the arm of a big chair, his trousers rucked so that his thin ankles, in gleaming silk socks, were fully exposed. Reeves leant back against the curved mantelpiece smoking a big pipe. Freddie stared at him with an egoistical curiosity, pondering on the evil fate which had sent this man across his path. For the day following the chestnut's tragic end, the little girl's flirtation had been more marked — her reckless pursuit of this eccentric stranger — plain for all to see.

Mr. Reeves must sit with her in the conservatory; he must come to develop photographs, there was a delicious impropriety in the hot darkness of the developing-room, with its single ray of shaded light, and the pungent smell of chemicals.

Reeves took it all calmly, a whimsical look on his face. But Freddie, too transparent, sulked in wretchedness, yet, in his generous and way, bore no malice to either, but blamed

himself for lacking some quality which pleased his wayward love.

It was true that, to his joy, Reeves came swiftly from the dark room, saying it made him faint, and sent him in to help—the result being the exit of Miss Violet in a pet.

"Funny place—the world," said Freddie drearily.

"A bitter and curious place," said Reeves dreamily. He liked this little foolish man who had saved him from death.

"Nere topsy-turvy kind of thing, don't-cher-know. One longs an' dreams for something, and then you get it, and, Lord! it's all upsides down. And you begin to wonder if you're right in going on with it at all. But"—Freddie grew wistfully shy—"fellows say marriage changes people."

"There is much proved evidence as to its doing so," said Reeves drily.

Freddie sat straighter. The unclean savour of the divorce court came to his nostrils.

"I mean that havin' a house and a kid and so on, some girls aren't so changeable," he said hopefully. "It must make a difference y'know. And then one could do everything for a girl, then."

"There's such a thing as doing too much." Reeves looked down at the little man's excited face. "Floyd, once, long ago, I did too much for a girl and—it made me what I am."

"But that's all right, isn't it?" said Freddie, startled.

"Oh, long may you think so, old boy. I wish to God I could. There are some women grateful

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

for a kind word. others who will see a man's very heart and soul ripped from his body and laid quivering at their feet, and who, if Mrs. Grundy happens to pass and say 'How shocking!' will elevate their noses and disdain the gift. Better buy them boxes of sweets, they understand that better. Oh, there are some women, of course who'll lay their own hearts and souls by yours and laugh at prudish custom. But they are hard to find, Floyd—hard to find."

Evelyn Gervase, unheard, had come into the doorway, and stood drawing back the heavy portières

"Better the box of sweets," said Reeves wearily, bought with a golden coin. If I had given the nibbons I might not be here now—I might know peace of mind, and not a constant peaceless ache."

"Oh, don't-cher-know," said Freddie leebly—he was not good at words—"but I do buy sweets, Fuller's, too—lots of 'em."

The dark eyes looked down amused. Clearly Freddie was puzzled by metaphor

"Stick to them, then," Reeves said, "and your heart in its place. When I'm gone, Floyd—it won't be long either before that happens—remember my advice"

"Go? Where?" asked Freddie, puzzled.

"A little while ago I could have sworn to my destination. Now, I don't know. Claxton has filled me with a desire to live. If I could intercept the burglar and pawn some of his treasure-trove, I'd go to the colonies."

"But Lord, you've lots of money, haven't you?" asked Floyd.

"Of course—heaps for my time. I was only joking. Some one coming in."

The curtains parted. Evelyn, very pale, came slowly through them. The pearls and the blue diamond had gone to London; she was jewelless, save for a few trifles, and even these had to go to Begbie's care each night.

She came over listlessly, sitting close to the huge wood fire.

"You look tired, Miss Gervase. What have you been doing?" Reeves asked.

"I have been choosing jewels," she said, in a low voice, her eyes on the crackling logs.

"And it failed to make you happy?" he asked almost sternly.

"They were mock jewels—they tired me," she said, twisting her long white fingers. "I could not match the colours, try as I would—they clashed and jarred."

"But the real stones, each one a thing of value, would have contented you," he said, with that flash of inward humour lighting his face. "False things are never quite the same, are they?—false stones, false dreams, false—loves?"

She sat up then, her face setting in sudden scorn.

"False ideals," she flashed out, "which can never return."

"Which can never return," he replied, looking steadily at her.

"You're rather like a pair of pollies, you two,

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

for a kind word; others who will see every heart and soul ripped from his body; quivering at their feet, and who, if Mrs. Claxton happens to pass and say 'How shocking! elevate their noses and disdain the gift. buy them boxes of sweets, they understand better. Oh, there are some women, of course who'll lay their own hearts and souls by your laugh at prudish custom. But they are hard find, Floyd—hard to find."

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sorry, Miss Gervaise," said Freddie. "And here is the—well, here's Begbie."

Tall and lean and stiff the jewel collector came in. He looked put out, and his pink nose suggested indigestion.

"Evelyn, I left the turquoises and opals on the design book," he said querulously. "We really get no nearer choosing those jewels of yours, and the man will be here almost at once"

"I could not see a combination which pleased me to-day," she said absently.

"Because you were determined not to be pleased. I tried the opals with everything, and you would not decide. Well, the string of coloured diamonds and black pearls will be easily arranged." He rubbed his thin, dry hand; and Reeves, watching, saw the girl wince.

"And Claxton burglaries have subsided," chattered Violet. "The Paynes were quite nervous about their dinner-party to-night. Now Ethel was here and says she is quite sure the man is gone for good. You know, she has some lovely things, rather barbarous, heavy arrangements which she never wears, and they are waiting for some money before they get them re-set—great lumps of rubies and sapphires and diamonds all humped up anyhow. I asked her why she would not wear the things to-night to keep them safe, and she says she can't. They would send them to the bank, but they are taking some of them to London on Friday. It reminds me, Freddie, you and I are dining there."



Kippin ! said Freddie rapturously, tugging  
the drive in the motor.

I wish we weren't, I'm sleepy. Ethel told me  
you've mushrooms for dinner; they bought  
them from Bateson. She said he's here. Oh, Mr.  
Reeves, did you find out how he grew them so  
quickly?"

"I never saw him," said Reeves.

And you plunged after him into the rain."

Violet. "He's a queer little thing—I saw  
him here to-day—with a slight limp and a twisted  
finger."

"With what?" Reeves's idle manner was  
careless. He sat up staring at her. "A limp and  
—"

Twisted finger. As if some one had screwed  
it when he was a baby. Do you hate hearing  
of horrors? Oh, dear, it's nearly time to dress."  
She yawned again, petulant, babyish—always  
striving to focus attention on her pretty little self,  
seemingly bored with the bull-eye glare which  
she never took off her

This man—Bateson—where does he live?"

"At Camberwell—a mile from Barham," said  
Reeves. "To be precise, just by the inn there  
you can turn down and see the cottage."

Reeves looked at the clock. His face was very  
tired and his eyes feverishly bright. He strolled  
out of the room.

Half an hour later, when Freddie and Violet had  
driven away in his motor, and James thumped  
the great gong in the hall, Reeves was late for

dinner. Sir Henry fidgeted uneasily. No one knew where Reeves was except that Dickson, the pantry boy, thought he had seen a figure in a waterproof go out under the dripping laurel-trees. It was nearly nine when Reeves, dripping and tired out, came hurrying in by a back entrance. He whistled for Dickson, changed his mud-laden boots, and ran upstairs, to be down again in a very few minutes.

"I'm so sorry, Lady Elverton, the wet day made my head ache and I slipped out, but it's one thing to start in this weather, another to get home. I ran when I found it was so late."

"You went some way, then?" Begbie's cold eyes fixed themselves upon him with a curious stare.

"Farther than I meant to."

"Yes; for you started early—about six."

"Later than that," said Reeves carelessly. "It was a mad freak of mine. Wet days are brain upsetting."

But he ate without appetite, stopping again and again as if to listen, answering questions at random, with an absence of his ordinary courteous attention.

"And I have had the most annoying news," burst out Sir Henry. "Hanbury, who was to have ridden my horse on Friday at Gates Hill—the horse is a moral of the race—wires to say he is ill, and here I am at the last minute, not knowing where to turn."

"I"—Reeves looked up—"I used to ride. If I have not forgotten how, I wonder if I could be of any use."

"Hotspur's a most peculiar brute. He pulls

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"I shall not fail you," said Reeves. "Honest, Henry, I'll try Rodriguez, and if he goes for I'll take him."

Henry immediately burst into a collection of a dozen things about his watch-horse, jumping from one to the other until the most painstaking not might have failed to understand what he

meant. "I wonder—Lady Elverton lighted her after-noon cigarette—" "I wonder how the Paynes' net is going off, and I trust the burglar is not

at all."

"I trust not." Two spots of colour burnt on Fred's cheekbones. His hands, as he cut his

tea, shook. He sat up, listening, as if for some-

thing he had expected all along. It was the hum of a motor putting to the hall door. A minute

later Violet burst into the room.

"My dear—your party! What has happened?"

And Susie Elverton.

"My dears—our party!" She pushed Floyd

and her, plainly afraid that he might get in a

word. "He came, Aunt Sue—he came!"

"He—who?" They clustered about the bright

figure, with its excited face and dancing eyes.

"The burglar! Oh, it's true! We were only

having dinner when we began to talk of him,

and Ethel said she was anxious—those barbaric

splendours of hers were oppressing her. And then—there was something good, I know, which I wanted to eat—one of the men ran in. He'd seen some one skirt across the lawn—the lights from the window fell on part of the shrubs—a stooping figure, going quickly and carrying something. Ethel just gave a start and flew upstairs, and we all flew to find her in hysterics. Her little terrier dead, the safe open, half the things gone—only half—some one must have disturbed him. Edgar Payne fled then for the police. Ethel still wept; the only decent thing seemed to be to come away, so we did it."

"He came just as you started dinner?" Evelyn Gervaise leant forward, her breath coming in gusts.

"He must have. Must have slipped upstairs, in fact, when it began, and Ethel's maid had tidied her room. Jack Payne says he must have been in the house, but the window was open, and he went out that way, down by the ivy. Oh dear, I'm so hungry. We were all hungry, but we couldn't eat much more dinner, with all the servants falling into each other. Jack bursting out with, 'Oh, do please eat—damn the fellow!' every second. Old Lady Grant got a cutlet on to her hair—upset there by a footman—it looked so funny!"

Begbie put on his glasses. He had drunk the affair in slowly, as he did all things, now he drummed his lean fingers on the table and sat lost in thought.

"But couldn't you track the man—see his footsteps?" asked Reeves.

"Oh, they tried that, but he had got on to the

avenue and then there were *bicycle-tracks* for a time. One could not follow any track, the motors soon rubbed out what there was. You know the night is black as ink, with constant squalls of rain."

"Mr. Reeves ought to know it. He was out in it." Begbie's dry voice broke in across the flood of chatter.

"Yes," Reeves smiled. "I grew stifled and went out into it. It is a bad night—a typical *housebreaker's friend*."

"Yes"—Begbie smoked a thin, black brand of cigar—"yes, a typical one."

"There is one thing." Violet was happy—she was the centre of observation; for when Freddie opened his mouth she drowned his attempts to speak in a fresh flood of chatter. "There is one thing."

"The red mud," said Freddie, breaking in at last. "You've forgotten that."

"I had not forgotten. One can't tell everything at once. That's all—I had not forgotten. Yes, that wasn't the one thing, but it's another. Jack Payne says they're wiring all along the lines to stop any man with red boots. Freddie, don't look corrective."

"Like a digestive pill," murmured Floyd patiently. "With red on his boots. You know the queer red soil at Monkshill, a kind of holding clay, it sticks to things for ages and ages. Well, they've explained that in the wires, and Jack thinks the man will very likely be arrested getting off some early train in London."

"It will stick to the tyres too," said Floyd—"the bicycle tyres. One could see the mud on that."

"Yes, one could tell by that." Reeves stirred the fire absently. His thoughts seemed far away. "But the fellow's boots, of course, would damn him." He went to the window, pulling the heavy curtains apart. A howling night mouthed at the glass, strange coppery lights hurried across the sky, as a hidden moon told of her prisonedness. Rattle and crash came the rain against the window; the sob of tossing, tortured trees rose and fell outside.

"Too hopeless," said Reeves to himself.

"How long would mud cling to boots?" Begbie looked up. "Wet, the red would stay, but in an hour or so surely its colour would fade; the roads outside here have some faint shading of that red. You were out late, Reeves. We'll see your boots, and how it clings to them."

He went to the door, stiffly, as he did all things, and they could hear him speaking to James, who chanced to cross the hall then.

With a little sob Evelyn Gervaise's head fell forward, she crumpled up and slid on to the floor inert and unconscious.

"Begbie! Hi! here! Come quickly! Miss Gervaise has fainted!"

The lean man ran back, a touch of genuine emotion on his thin face. He knelt by the girl's side, calling for salts and brandy.

"There is some colour on her cheeks," he said. "She'll be all right. There, Miss St. Maur—the





## CHAPTER VII

### MR. FITSON FROM LONDON

A PALLID sky, weary and peevish from its excess of temper, a little sobbing wind crowding in corners, worn out by its riot of fury. Yesterday it had torn off branches, raged roaring against mighty trees, howled, a mighty thing, across the world. To-day it whimpered softly from the west, lifting now and again in tiny whirlwinds a few leaves less sodden than their fellows, peering with frightened eyes at the havoc it had worked—at fallen limbs of trees, at gaps in loose stone walls.

A blotted halo in the foggy sky showed where the sun lurked, too weakly to win through. But the air was warm; the penitent-child wind blew softly as Reeves drove to Holderness to meet the hounds.

It was far away, a big wood skirting a range of hills, with the sea lapping greyly on the far side. The horses had gone on by train, and they were motoring, saving an earlier start and later return.

The car hummed along the drying roads, purring with cat-like joy upon the level, taking the hills with a conqueror's might, tame as a dove upon the brakes.

"Running as sweet," Marks, the chauffeur, said, "as honey-and-treacle."

Reeves asked him questions now and then. He knew nothing of a motor's mechanism. But he asked them idly, scarcely listening for the answers—with small idea in his mind of ever driving one of the humming monsters himself.

Marks, keen as every chauffeur is on his car, pointed out the brakes and clutch, showed the puzzling little levers, the various ways of oiling; and once, as he lighted a cigarette, he gave Reeves the steering gear, unconscious of the man's inability as he took it.

"A mere touch does it," said Reeves, with a little gasp as they passed a cart.

"Less than that, sir—a thought. A touch means the hedge, so it does—the hedge an' lupset."

Evelyn and Sir Henry sat at the back; there were bags and luncheon-baskets, and Reeves had elected to sit in front. He did not want to talk. Melancholy held him in her chill talons, making his thoughts her own.

A hunt or two, a few rushes through the keen winter air, and then—what? He could see no lift in the black clouds which gathered in front. Violet's high voice had chattered to him as he left. She drove, ill-pleased, with Floyd—a little butterfly, striving so hard to perch upon the closed petals of his attention. What if he took her at her word—flung the past away, and let this butterfly save him? What lifting of horrified hands, what clamouring voices of injured relatives, if his hands closed about the fluttering, foolish wings, and he

said "This is my wife." Trouble drives triers. The strange places. The bitterness in him was kind-minded to do it, and see what would happen. Floyd—his brow contracted—would he not be well rid of this flirting baby who made his life a misery to him? He would see. He leant back too tired to war against the rushing thoughts, and let fate's tide carry him. For the intolerance of the beautiful woman behind him, no thought of good should hold him back. Evil, his master, should be his guide and friend.

Then the mood died; and melancholy held sway again, wiping it out. Better after all his first plan and idea, a month's amusement and then—oblivion.

A colder air blew through a cleft in the hills. They were not far from the sea. The car swooped down a hill, flung itself smooth and mighty at a toilsome hill, and they were at the meet.

A small one to-day. It was a chancey hope of hunting; foxes seldom left that huge chain of woods, and if they did, there were only the mountains and the fenceless downs between them and the sea-coast.

Reeves swung himself on to his bay—it was quite sound again now. Evelyn was occupying a small portion of one of Sir Henry's weight carriers, a mountainous beast, which could not fall if it was never put out of its pace. Its affable plunge of joy dug two pits from the soft ground as it came down, and then it peered with mighty eye, almost surprised, into the cavities, as if inclined to cry "'Ware rabbit-hole!" to the horses behind it. There was something almost uncanny in the Atom:

"What a place to get lost in!" said Reeves. The second fox took them out upon the heaving downs. A maze of coarse-grassed hills, one like another, crossed here and there by sheer deep gullies and wandering streams, muddy torrents to-day, after yesterday's rain.

"Our landmark," said Violet, pointing to the turret of the west lodge, grey against a patch of Scotch fir.

She had stuck close to Reeves, delighted romance thrilling her vain heart. What if he meant it, and she electrified the world by a daring deed? What of Freddie? Something hurt her, a blankness rose in front of her that she could not put away; but then, the excitement of a run away—"to sail away in a fairy boat." Her blue eyes fire, she rode with the quiet, sad-eyed man, and her folly and his reckless bitterness they were nearer to a mad deed than they thought.

But fate, on a huge lumbering horse, persistently dogged them. Wherever they strayed—into nooks among the woods, in hollows on the downs, Evelyn pervaise came with them—silent, aloof, that look of scorn on her cold face, but always near enough to prevent Violet talking as she meant to; to keep Reeves from reckless speech.

As their second fox broke from the woods and ran along the downs, she was with them still, dogging the aggrieved Atom until he panted with weariness.

"One could get lost here all the time," said Reeves. "Once over a couple of those billows of

grass, and the west lodge would be seen no more, and then one might wander in a circle, or find oneself away upon the edge of a still, grey sea."

"With the fairy-boat ready," flashed Violet merrily.

"Ay, or a convict-hulk," he answered moodily. "Who knows? A ghost-ship from the past." He pulled out his watch, and shook his head. Let hounds run where they would. He would not be at the west lodge towards three o'clock.

"They're coming this way. There he goes. Look!" A big dog-fox came loping, unhurried, over a hill, looked back, and stretched away easily across the downs, disdaining the shelter behind him. He knew of a sanctuary farther on, if he did not care to go back.

With a burst of music the Claxton hounds, chosen more for strength than speed, swung and came over the hill—a cluster of keen, blood-thirsty faces as they topped the rise, a wave of pied, straining bodies as they dashed by.

The Atom gave another bound, and stamped an ant-heap flat. He reached at his bits, mad to lumber on.

A stream, steep-banked and full of muddy, swift water, lay between them and the pack. To cross it they must go back, and it seemed to bend to the right.

"We'll find a crossing soon," said Reeves, galloping on, up one billow of grass and down another, while the field swept away right-handed towards a clump of trees on a hill.

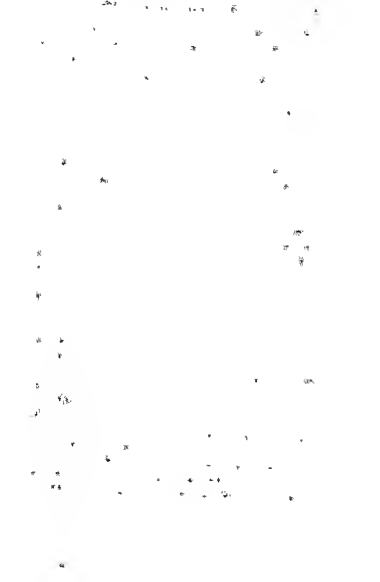
"What a place to get lost in!" said Reeves. The second fox took them out upon the heaving downs. A maze of coarse-grassed hills, one like another, crossed here and there by sheer deep gullies and wandering streams, muddy torrents to-day, after yesterday's rain.

"Our landmark," said Violet, pointing to the turret of the west lodge, "is against a patch of Scotch fir."

She had struck close to Reeves' old lighted romance, thinking he ran fast. What if he meant it, and she electrified the world by a daring deed? What of Freddie? Something hurt her, a blankness rose in front of her that she could not put away, but then, the excitement of a run away—to sail away in a fairy boat. Her blue eyes afloat, she rode with the quiet sad-eyed man, and in her folly and his reckless bitterness they were nearer to a mad deed than they thought.

But fate, on a huge lumbering horse persistently dogged them. Wherever they strayed—into nooks among the woods, in hollows on the downs Evelyn Gervaise came with them—silent, dumb, that look of scorn on her cold face, but always near enough to prevent Violet talking as she meant to; to keep Reeves from reckless speech.

As their second fox broke from the woods and ran along the downs, she was with them still, urging the aggrieved Atom until he panted with





ve in the luncheon basket. A heavy door slammed  
to drive."

Without any idea of what he was doing he slipped the clutch. The big car swooped like a hungry eagle at the road, Evelyn landed beside him, and let, screaming, took a header into the luncheon basket. Grasping the steering wheel, he turned it, the car, on one wheel, purred, not along the road to Claxton, but straight for a track on the billowing sands.

"Stop her! Turn her!" shrieked Violet. "This is not the way home——"

But he was reckless now; as the car had started to save him, he would use her.

They tore on at bewildering speed, and staring at the levers, he knew he could not moderate

"If you . . . don't . . . understand . . . Brake," came Violet's voice, torn from her by the wind. "Four . . . feet, . . ." she shrieked. "We'll be dead! . . . Change . . . the . . . gear."

Leeves used his feet vaguely; but checked at the speed, the big car lurched and shuddered, and he raised his feet again and shook his head. All directions were Greek to him, and Evelyn knew little.

A rocking blur, the car tore on; up little hills, down slopes, with the sickening swiftness of a lift, serving, ill guided, round bends. Blinded, sore from the rush of the wind, they sat wondering what would happen.

Evelyn sat very still.

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come here among us, risking so much? Coming here to . . ."

"Hush!" he checked her, and the car flew towards the steep of the rise. "Not that word, Evie. Though if they knew who I was, there would be scant mercy for me here if I were recognised. There would be other people to suspect me then, as you suspect me, Evelyn."

"Oh, I wish to God I did not!" she burst out.

"And—how I wish it too," he said. "But for the wish you've uttered we must try to save our lives. Without doubt there will be a hill as steep as this one to go *down*, and the road will lead straight into the sea. Can you tell me how to check the thing, or shall I run off the track and trust to providence?"

There were jutting crags at one side, a deep ditch at the other. Evelyn shuddered and shook her head; then she looked back. Far away on the ribbon of road she saw another car coming as fast as they had.

"They are following us!" she cried. "They are following . . . you."

He bit his lip hard.

"They will catch us in the sea, then, if I cannot turn," he muttered between set teeth. "Oh, if I knew what these things meant!" He put his feet on the brakes; he could have stopped them on the steep and would not, knowing what was behind him. It was no longer a run-away, but a race for liberty.

Water full of stone now, but lower  
water.

[illegible]

Дана следующая таблица значений функции  $f(x)$  и  $g(x)$  на отрезке  $[0, 1]$ :

1. Explain what is meant by the term "cognitive bias" and give an example of how it might affect a person's decision-making process.

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3) Die drei Hauptbestandteile des Systems sind die drei Hauptkomponenten des Systems, die die drei Hauptkomponenten des Systems sind.

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at that point they could not hope to turn on to  
The tumbling waves came crashing up, lashed  
by yesterday's storm. Reeves loosed one  
and the car swerved, keeping nearly against  
the waves.

"I thought so," Marks had said. "A touch  
more the light."  
"I can't drive," he cried helplessly. "I can't  
steer with one hand. I don't know what you mean  
unless you show me what to do."

The grey waves were rushing to meet them—  
all about with white foam on their jaws waiting  
for their prey. The tide was high, licking the bank  
all about it had piled up close to the road. Two  
men as they kept past them, shrieked out, crouching  
against the foam.

"And we are so much unhappier than they are,"  
said Reeves, one of his rare smiles lighting his face.  
It was time for action. He bent down, looking  
at the levers which governed this run-away thing.  
He bent lower. These girls must be saved though  
it would end for him when the other car came  
upon him, and Fison knew his victim. It had  
been very sweet—the short return to life, and his  
heart ached for the quiet of the sea.

One. He twisted, nothing happened.  
"Oh! . . . oh!" shrieked Violet from behind.  
Reams worried him.

For luck was with him, he turned off the  
the flying car seemed to shiver, its pulsing  
out. The impetus swept them across the  
ere her life left her, her front wheels sank

in the pebble ridge not ten yards from a leaping, steel-grey sea. The foot brakes acted now, or their pace might even have carried them into it.

Crash came the waves, the back rush sweeping a host of pebbles back with a grinding roar, froth and drift lay thick across the verge.

For a few seconds they sat staring at it, the rebel of the escape stunning them. Then Violet, who had flung off her habit-skirt and let it fall under her long coat, jumped out and ran round, swift, pointed censure on her pretty face.

"I thought at first you were driving at that pace on purpose," she cried. "When I saw you knew nothing I nearly died of fright. You were driving us straight to the sea. Oh you were mad—mad!"

"But why? All we want is the fairy-boat," said Reeves whimsically. His voice was very tired. Death is not a pretty thing as it stares you in the face—it had called to him from the foam-capped ridges, and the death of all he cared for came on behind with the remorseless throb of the descending car.

"If I could go on—leave you two to Mr. Payne," he said swiftly.

"Start!" said Evelyn. "We must come too. The other car only holds two."

"Yes, start—they're coming," Evelyn said imperiously.

But he stood still; knowing so little, he dared not risk them again.

"If you two would stay," he said, pleading.

Then the following motor, brilliant-eyed, parred down out of the dusk. He stood quietly now that the end had come, that Fitson's keen memory must bring suspicion and worse—discovery—upon him. His little flight had been a short one, after all.

"Oh, we've got you—got you!" Freddie's voice rang shrill in trembling joy. Freddie tumbled out of Sir Henry's car, and embraced Violet before them all.

Reeves looked, and, reeling, caught at the car's bonnet.

"Payne said he saw your flight off the wrong way, the car out of control. I came just as you started. Lord! how we drove her, Marks!"

"We did that, sir," said Marks heavily, wiping his face.

"When we saw you wobbling about the road—and, good Heaven! when you topped that hill and we knew what was beyond."

"We came down looking for death ourselves," said Marks glumly, wiping his face. "Captain Floyd knows no fear."

"Freddie, please let me go," said Violet, with dignity. "And, pick up my habit-skirt."

"Now, what on earth did you shed that for?" Freddie asked.

"I was getting ready to swim, of course," she said, with dignity.

"Oh, Vi, don't-cher-know," he said rapturously, and all her admiration of his reckless pursuit was drowned by his pet expression.

"Plungin' down that 'ill," said Marks, "with the sides slipping past like a river in flood—and not know from Adam how we was to turn. But then we saw you pulled up, and the Captain all but upsets her from pure joy. It was a near thing, Mr. Reeves."

"It was, indeed," he said quietly—"far too near. The beach shelves quickly here beyond the ridge; we should have been nose under in a second."

The steel-grey waves, storm-driven, broke with a snarling splash. White-crested, they rushed up the pebble ridge, fretting for the spoil they had lost—steel and machinery and human life powerless in their grasp. The sea is a cruel monster, tempting men to its silvery calm that it may destroy them in its wrath. It was vexed now.

They sped along the smooth road, on round Holderness Ridge, and fast home to Claxton. Reeves sat quietly by Marks, but every touched thing, every movement, was noted carefully now. Tired as he was, he questioned and remembered.

As they turned in through the wide gates, and saw the lighted windows at Claxton, he drew a deep breath. The world was still his for a day or two. With the ball at his feet, would he be a fool if he did not kick a goal?

Violet lung back in the hall.

"He sits up, Marvin says, by the fire in the octagon landing. I'll slip up there to-night and talk to him," she whispered to herself.



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golden ballast. She wanted money to dip her pretty hands into, not the mere comfort Freddie could give her.

And Freddie—the blankness, strive as she would, came again. It was difficult to imagine her world without Freddie to laugh at—Freddie so foolish, and so very loving.

Reeves, a book in his hand, came slowly up the wide stairway. His face was white, and his eyes looked over bright.

"I—I left that girl downstairs," he muttered to himself.

Violet turned demurely.

"I left you reading," he said.

"And you find me here. Magic!" she answered merrily.

"Old Magic," he said, with grim softness. "Old Magic. Little Butterfly, that doesn't matter."

She sat on a low, broad table, swinging her small feet in their pinching shoes.

"Sit here and talk to me for a few minutes before you go to bed," she said. "Just of fairy-boats—or what you like."

He stood looking at her, a curious smile on his well-cut mouth, then came across.

"You know you interest me, Man of Mysteries," she pattered, "and we never get a moment down there. I've never met a man who lived alone in a huge house, and was only scrubbed—I mean helped by a scrubber. Oh!"—she held up her bright face—"ask me to tea some day, and make it yourself."

of champagne I didn't pour out, and a meeringue or two, and some savouries. A taste of supper would do you good."

Marvin, visibly tempted, said she was nervous

"The emeralds lie heavy on my heart," she said dramatically

"Try a little tongue and a meeringue or two instead," murmured James. "Do, my dear Mr. Reeves will be up in a minute

Marvin, declaring she was far too delicate to eat, allowed herself to be persuaded

"A look at them can't hurt me," she murmured, as she walked towards a door opening on to the passage to the back stairs and cannoned against Violet as she came rushing in

"I beg your pardon, miss," she said, horrified.

"It's all right. You go on down, Marvin"

Violet peered at the empty landing, softly lighted by a glow from hanging lanterns

"Now, why on earth," said James, as he took Marvin's thin arm, "did the honourable Violet come up by the back stairs?"

"The Lord alone knows that one's flighty ways," said Marvin peevishly.

Violet came on, slowly now, her naughty mind set for adventure, all her love for notoriously stirred by this half-jesting prate for fairy-boats. What if her flirtation ran beyond the border-line, and she was some one to point at for a few months?

"Ran away, y'know. Oh, yes, quite a romance. An eccentric millionaire." In all Violet's dreams there was no fairy-boat unless it was laden with

golden ballast. She wanted money to dip her pretty hands into, not the mere comfort Freddie could give her.

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"A look at them can't hurt me," she murmured as she walked towards a door opening on to the passage to the back stairs and leaned against Violet as she came rushing in.

"I beg your pardon, miss," she said hoarsely.

"It's all right. You go on down Marvin. Violet peered at the empty landing, softly lit by a glow from hanging lamp-rings.

"Now, why on earth," said James, as he took Marvin's thin arm, "did the Lord alone Violet come up by the back stairs?"

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"I shall be charmed," he said gravely, standing beside her. Was there ever such a brazen flirt? so pretty, with her rose-leaf skin and rounded slender arms bare beneath a veil of chiffon. Women had been out of his life for so long. His breath came faster; but he stood aloof, for he remembered Freddie.

"You only fence with the others. Tell me about yourself," she coaxed—"of those colonies where you lived. And sit down." She patted the table.

He sat by her, half frowning and half smiling, lighting a cigarette. If flirtation were thrust upon him, why should he resist? One finger brushed her soft arm, and his blood leaped at the contact. Little foolish butterfly, fluttering her painted wings. Where would the pretty colours be if he caught and held her?

"Yes, it was very lonely out in my colony," he answered. If she knew, how she would jump away and scream, and ask him how he dared, and pant downstairs to the shelter of the patient arms which always ached to hold her.

He, Ernest Reeves, masquerader, gaol-bird, to dare to sit by a little lady's side and touch her satin flesh. She took him for some owner of vast tracks of farm, for a man whose wealth was boundless—he could see that.

"Was there no society? Were you near no big town?" she asked, and came closer. It is so easy to slide along a table's flat surface, when a yielding piece of upholstery would betray your wriggles.

"Were there no people?"

"There were heaps of people," he said drearily. "The loneliness was that of companionship."

"The loneliness of companionship!" she repeated, amazed.

"Ay, life was a long lesson in my—colony, Miss St. Maur. We learnt many things. Of the worth of human charity; of the strange faces it nestles behind. Of the cleverness of rats—human rats."

"Good gracious!" said Violet, shivering.

"Creatures which burrow in noisome places, and live by plunder, and are hunted and trapped, or worried to death."

"O-oh!" the girl shuddered. "And I quite thought Australia was respectable"

"I believe it is, too." He came out of his reverie.

"I should not talk to you of these things."

"I like it" She came closer. "They send a little shiver down my back."

"Happy shiver!" he said satuously, and smiled bitterly. Surely, when flirtation was the order of the night, that was a correct answer. It seemed to have been, for she was staring at him with expectant eyes, and her fingers were near his own.

"But, of course you made and had such heaps of money there?" she questioned softly.

He did not laugh—she should have a true answer.

"I can assure you I never knew what it was to want it," he said emphatically.

"Oh, how nice!" She came nearer: her arm was against his, the scent from the lace on her bodice came to him. She was soft and feminine, and eminently desirable, and yet with a shrewd





more reliable reading is given in the previous two  
pages (pages) 40

The first part of the book is devoted to a study of the history of the Church in England from the time of the Roman invasion to the present day. The author discusses the various influences which have shaped the development of the Church, and shows how it has adapted itself to changing circumstances. He also deals with the question of the Church's mission in the world, and its responsibility towards society.

Values, including a number of estimates of interest, are given in the enclosed document.

"I know you didn't want to go here for the first  
time, but you had to go and you were in better  
company than you were back at the old place, and  
it was a good thing for you."

"Where were we, little lady? Oh, at poetry, when I was, and engagements - they make me think, you see. Well - for I asked him at last -" said you, do you think, before anybody if you loved a man? we both cast into eager questions, and yet before us lay? Could any woman do that?"

"Oh, of course they will," she said prettily, because she knew it was the right thing to say. "Mr. Brown, if I really loved, if I lost the love man, and I saw him murder some one, I would avenge it."



having taken under an understanding of action and law, pointed almost her willow stick.

"Some people," she said, "as the dream was just a dream, the girl said," "would think that good enough to go to a lot of."

"Oh, Mr. Brown," she said, "I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

"Oh, I see," he said, "I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

"I don't," she said, "I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

"Yes," he said, "I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

"I don't," she said, "I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

"You should not dream," he said, "What was the dream?" she said, "I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

"Oh," she said, "I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

"With, or more, I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of. I don't think that it is a matter to go to a lot of."

was manslaughter and no wrong. There must be perfect trust for perfect love." Violet could turn sentences prettily. Half of this she had read, and the manslaughter piece had been declaimed by a leading actress in a risky play; but he had been too long out of the world to have read one or heard the other.

"You've got so much in you?" he said moodily.

Violet racked her brains to remember more of that play, but could only think of Payne in his last musical comedy, so was content to look romantic. He would not do.

"So much behind your fluffy hair?" he muttered again. Violet wondered whether it was a compliment, or the reverse.

"So——" he came suddenly out of his moody fit, one of his flashes of silent humour lighting his tired face. "So—and your pretty little head holds its worries, does it?"

There was tenderness—the dangerous tenderness which some men can assume at will—in his voice.

"Oh—such worries" Violet flashed a smile worthy of an Odonto advertisement on him. Once the conversation grew personal, she felt a fresh interest in it. "The worries of a Society girl with an inadequate allowance. You colonials have no idea of it. One must be clothed, you see."

"Well, yes—it's usual," he said pleasantly, moving his hand close to the soft white one which lay, pink palm upwards, on the dark wood.

"Dress, flowers, hats, gloves, even these things"—in a fit of audacity she pointed to where, her dress



The man's better nature flung the momentary temptation off. He might hurt the flutterer, make her his enemy. Yet——

"Miss St. Maur," he said.

"Yes." She came back, standing with bent head. Something about the man fascinated her——made her reckless.

And as they stood, Floyd came quietly up the stairway and stood, scarcely aware that he was listening, as the flood of bitterness swept over his loving soul. Violet coming to meet this man here in the dim corridor, with the stage set for love. His nails driving into his hands, he stood rooted, his one idea not to let them know, yet waiting so that, if either turned, they must see him.

"Miss St. Maur."

"It is a pretty name," she said saucily, her white round chin raised.

"Miss—Violet." His breath came hard, and Freddie's breath came faster. "Listen to me, I'm mere flesh and blood. Will you take a man's advice?"

"If it's nice?" Violet St. Maur was enjoying herself thoroughly.

"Then"—he moved back, facing her—"then here it is, you little piece of thistledown, yet I believe no worse. I've been too long away from your flirt prettily. My food's tough steak, not is and meringue. If I had let myself at your word to-night we should both sorry."

She stared at him, half frightened now.

"Here's the advice." His voice rang hoarsely, and Freddie swayed forward. "There's a man downstairs who loves you better than you deserve. Oh, you meant no harm, but you set the scene for drama all the time. Love, you thoughtless little butterfly, is not so easy to find, though he has a hundred imitations—false coin such as you butterflies issue. Tempt what belongs to you."

"Oh, you are kind! How dare you!" she flashed out furiously, scarcely believing her own ears, as this hail of truths rattled about them.

"Kinder perhaps than you think. That man of yours is a ripper—a bigger hero than you can imagine, even though his manner is against him."

Freddie repeated the word. "manner" in a voiceless whisper, tugging at his little moustache, his face wet and white.

"And he has another fault—he adores you too openly; puts you on a pedestal and worships you, when a little plain speaking would make you see his worth. The advice comes to an end. Stick to Freddie. Don't try him too highly, or dream of eloping in fairy-boats with unknown qualities, for he—for all his silly ways—will love you when youth's pretty painting fades, and men call you old."

Freddie stood straighter.

"Right there," he whispered. "Right, my little Vi."

"And don't look so angry, child. This is the crux of the advice. Don't play with fire as you did to-night. Some day it may catch and scorch you,



and your illogical little mind would horribly."

"Have you quite finished?" Violet had been quite so angry in her life. Her little dragged from its shaded softness, and called temptation. To be lectured, corrected, have praises sung to her—her sharp teeth grated stood. "Have you—quite finished?" she asked. "You're the rudest man I've ever met. How dare you! Oh, how dare you! I was only talking—as one does to men. Freddie"—she chose "is at least a gentleman."

"Exactly," said Reeves. "A prince of 'em. It's because of that, that I speak as a mere brute."

Steps sounded on the stairs. Freddie, hearing them, slipped down rapidly. He had been sent up for a book on bridge, to settle a knotty dispute downstairs, and had forgotten all about it in his wretchedness at the tableau he had come across. But Reeves was a man to trust, though loyal to Freddie's ears had resented the hard words meted out to his girl. Of course, she was only playing in her foolish way.

Begbie was on his heels. He trampled upstairs with loud steps, whistling *Hiawatha* in shrillest notes. "Freddie!"

Violet started round. The meeting, the dim light, the two alone in the corridor, would be so hard to explain away.

"Freddie!" she whispered.

"Yes, and fortunately heralding his coming."

Otherwise—you see how my advice fits in. Even Freddie may be tried too highly, and you are really afraid of doing it."

"Hallo!" Freddie came in. "What are you two conspiring about? I've come for a book on bridge, and Begbie's on my tail. I took a long time, don't-cher-know."

"Floyd, we are all waiting" Mr. Begbie was querulous and irritable. "We are sitting with our hands face down upon the table. Why have you taken so long?"

The dimness hid Floyd's stricken little face. He muttered something vaguely. "I'll get the book now," he cried, trying to keep Begbie on the stairs; but the lean man moved on, until the two by the fire, standing well apart now—Violet flushed and ill at ease—were plainly visible.

"Reeves!" Begbie drew his thin lips in. "I thought you had got a headache, and—Miss St. Maur." His looks spoke volumes, as he eyed the pair.

"Yes—but I met Miss St. Maur."

"Quite accidentally," put in Violet.

"Oh, of course. Precisely." Cold disbelief in a cold voice. "Precisely. Now I feel sure that my opinion as to that penalty is a correct one. And I still cannot imagine, Floyd, what delayed you for twenty minutes."

Freddie, looking like a whipped schoolboy, said unhappily that he could not find the stairs, tripped over that, and, his eyes on Violet, stammered it was "a long book up to walk," and then, covered



down. Once he turned his head, looked hard at Reeves, and then went on again.

"Bartering so many jewels for a human peg to hang them on," muttered Reeves. "Evelyn will then flash and glitter—repay you."

Little Freddie Floyd left the window, coming near to his irate love.

"Vi," He looked at her humbly, craving for a word of explanation which he would believe implicitly, yet less humble and dog-like than his wont.

"Vi, I thought you had gone to bed."

"So did I—but I didn't," said Violet sulkily.

"That's just it—but," he repeated, "you did it."

Ernest Reeves's face lit with its swift smile. He was better away. If Freddie knew, he would not blame him.

"Good night!" he said

"Good night, old chap!" With no idea of Freddie's eavesdropping, Reeves was astonished at the sudden friendly clasp, the ring in the little man's voice. "Good night, Miss St. Maur!"

Violet nodded curtly

There was a fire in Reeves's room; he moved to it, his face set sadly. "A little piece of leather-brained humanity," he said to himself. "Without ballast, with nothing but a love of cheap excitement, and necessary to that good fellow's happiness. Lord. How strange these mortals be," he said, dropping into his easy chair. "How strange—these—mortals be."

Outside, in the corridor, Violet knew she must answer for the ring she was bound by.



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## CHAPTER IX

### THE THEFT

"VI, I say, don't-cher-know "

"Freddie!" There was scant penitence in Violet's tones. Conscious of being in the wrong, she meant to pass it off with her usual high hand. "That's a most idiotic expression."

"Yes, my manner is against me, Vi, and its dull expression; but look here, Vi"—he touched the ring on her hand softly—"you said you'd take me, didn't you?"

Explanation was upon her.

"I was so bored here," she yawned, and spoke crossly.

"And that was where I came in," he said, without resentment. "I know I'm only a dull little fellow, Vi, not worthy to tie your laces; but, if you marry me, I'll be your husband, and, dull as I am, expect you to care a little for me. I couldn't bear too much. Then, there have been others, and I've stuck on——"

"Oh, blindly, limpet-like!" she flashed out, trying in her usual way to say something smart, and, pleased with the words, watched for their effect.

"Put it in that way. Until you made me the happiest fellow on earth. Vi, I did. What is this man Reeves, this mere stranger, to you? And am I nothing? Why show him so plainly that he interests you? Why meet him here, so late? I'm not angry, dear, I love you too much for that; but, after all, you're engaged to me——"

"Engaged!" She would not stand a lecture—her furious fingers tore at the diamond ring. "Engaged—not married, as yet, Captain Floyd. Remember that."

He drew back, his face very white.

"I suppose I've muddled it," he said wretchedly.

"Not married. No. Do you think I'm going to stand bullying, distrust, from you!" she burst out. "There! take your ring and—good night!" She flung her defiance at him dramatically.

She turned her back, her pretty face afire. And Freddie, humble, loving Freddie, did not rush forward with a wail of forgiveness, did not pray her to take back her words—that he would never suspect, never distrust her again. But, as she peered over her white shoulder, she saw him standing, with a new dignity on his sad face—standing quiet and silent.

"Take your ring!" She held it out to him.

"And this is irrevocable, Vi?" He spoke in a low voice, believing it.

"Of course. Good night!"

"Oh, yes. Good night!" He took the flashing ring, smiling, as pitifully he thought of his joy in its choice—how he had spent an hour at the jeweller's.



A favourite race mare had provided its price. "Quite irrevocable? I'm too dull, too stupid, I suppose. Too foolish. But not quite foolish enough, Violet, to see the girl who's going to marry me compromise herself; set tongues such as Begbie's wagging. I saw him smile as he went away, and look at me. I may be a little fool. Heaven knows I trust you, and would have trusted you utterly; but I expect you to justify the trust." Hopeless of pleasing her, he spoke his mind at last. A new Freddie, stung to a new manhood.

"Have you finished? For I'm going," she burst out, standing quite still, almost unable to understand that Freddie was not clinging about her praying for forgiveness. This man was something strange.

"Yes. It's quite final, I suppose. I'd—planned a lot of things for you, Vi. Well, so be it," his voice trailed away.

Planned a lot of things for her. A blankness such as she had never dreamt of settled upon the girl—a grey fog of doubt and wonder. For the first time she did not twist her lover as she chose. There were debts in front, a possible prisondom at her old aunt's home, with only the cold moors to spread her butterfly wings on. Yet she could not believe that Freddie would not come forward, and, in his repentance, leave her victor, as she always had been.

"So be it." He walked to the landing window, shot the bolts, and something tinkled on the slates outside.

"My ring!" she cried aghast. "Oh, what fools men are!"

"Yes, it's no value now, don't-cher-know." A white, stricken Freddie, suffering quietly, spoke to her.

"No one else shall ever wear it," he cried. "And so, good night, Violet!"

As he re-fastened the window, Begbie's voice came to him; the jewel collector walked slowly up the stairs.

"Floyd—really! I won that game, and it's Sir Henry's deal. Are you ever coming?"

"I'm sorry, Begbie. I was saying good night to Miss St. Maur. Yes, I feel like playing bridge. I'm coming down. I'll follow you."

Violet flounced to the stairs—her room was higher up—she turned. This little man was quite unlike Freddie. Could he resist her as she stood there in all her pretty bravery? He was going slowly towards the stairway. Tears smarted under her eyelids, tides of petulant temper.

"Good night!" Freddie said heavily, not looking up.

"Oh—good night, Cross Patch!" flashed out Miss Violet, and fled.

Freddie stood still. He had caught the note of tears in her trembling voice. If she had not meant it as final—if there was yet hope for him? But he shook his smoothly brushed flaxen head. It was over, and life stretched empty before him; yet he would not go and beg forgiveness, because a new power was upon him, and he knew that he was right.



They swayed a little across the corridor into the dim light thrown by the lanterns.

Then Reeves's right hand—he had caught the man with his left—shot out and came with a clear punch straight under the burglar's pointed jaw. He went over like a shot rabbit, sprawling on the floor, the stunted revolver tumbling from his nerveless fingers.

And it was all a drama of silence—the fall on to the thick carpet, the lowered voices. No sound had alarmed the quiet house.

"Fairly done." The little man sat up, raising his hands.

Reeves started, seeing one forefinger twisted.

"Jim, the cracksman!" he muttered. "Jim!" and started back.

"The Duke! Gawd! The Duke *here!*"

The men stared at each other dumbly; the burglar, sick and dizzy, reeled to a sofa, and sat down.

"The Duke," he stammered. "Well, the game's yours. Shout! Call the copper, and send me back to King's lodgin's."

"I might." Reeves stood, the heavy little revolver in his hand. "And so you nearly shot me, Jim."

"Gorlomme! She's empty," grinned the man. "I can stand free food and lodgin', but I've no mind for free rope; that little barker's scared a lot in her time. Well, Duke, we can talk now freer than we could, eh, till the cops come—freer nor in horspital, hey?"

Both very ill, they had lain in hospital side by

side, and, evading the rules, had talked to each other. Later, they had been employed at the same work, until a strange friendship had sprung up between the two.

"Here on the same lay, be you?" Jim, the cracksmen, jerked up his aching head.

"No, Jim—no. Here as a guest. But look here, give me your spoils. I thought it might be you. I went to your cottage the night of the Monks-hill burglary, but it was shut up, and, peering in, I saw a man asleep by the fire, so came away satisfied. When I heard of the finger I thought of you immediately."

"Good dummy that," said the burglar cheerily. "I leaves 'im there nights. So I'm to give up, an I? I've only got these." He pulled a flat case from his pocket. "You see, I've been watchin' outside, so spotted the room and, as I ran in, I'm blest if I didn't see this case on the table. I opened it—that was enough. I was off with a fortin in my pocket, and my last crib cracked. Jim could have had his decent public and lived honest if you hadn't put yer nose in. See."

He snapped the case open, showing the shining ripple of green, with the light frosting of diamonds here and there.

Reeves took it. "Now go." Reeves pointed to the window. "I'll have no hand in shutting you up, Jim. You are Bateson the gardener, with the black beard, I suppose—but go. And, if fifty pounds would keep you from this job, I'll send it to you in a fortnight. Address?"

"Lynch's Inn, Bloomsbury. But"—the little, twisted creature rose unsteadily, and his mouth was twisting now—"you're lettin' me off, Duke. Lor'! I felt the prison clothes on. I was only on this lay for a last time—strife, there's a girl, and I hadn't a penny . . . just enough to try the gardener dodge."

So even to this stunted little robber came love—he stole now for some one else; saw no harm in a home set up on the proceeds of some one's jewels; meant, perhaps, to keep his smurched soul clean for the hereafter, and look to his own lastenings at night.

The whimsical flash of humour lit Reeves's face, but his eyes were sad.

"Go," he said. "Go, Jim. I can't give you over to the police, and any one may come. Half the house is awake still."

"Good luck, Duke. I won't forget you—strife, I won't." The lean figure sped noiselessly, with a trained power of going silently, to the window. A blast of cold air made the logs glow again; then there was only the thin draught from the missing pane, and Cracksman Jim, evil little criminal, yet human and with a heart, stepped into the wild night, and was gone.

Reeves watched him go, then came down to the dying fire—the case in his hands.

"So," he said to himself, "it was Cracksman Jim. And I—of course I ought to have rung the bell and given him in charge; but it's not in me to-night to mete out fresh misery to humanity. Poor



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Both very ill, they had lain in hospital side by



is no jest in those, but folly capped and very real."

"Have you kept them?" she cried.  
"You kept my letters?"

"Safely. I have them with me here  
use idle threats, you see."

Her proud head drooped. What ho if this man, a felon showed her mad I mock certificate they had made out. Folly! something more than folly lay be to crush her life, if this man chose—

"And you would show them?" she murmured.  
"And lose you your gems?" No, Evie, I th

I don't want to speak of this. But you ren when you came down in your white brocade its slummer and richness, and the beauty of soft flesh above it did not content you. 'Nomonds?' scolded my lady, 'the brocade cried them.' There were tears in her lovely eyes as pulled off a necklace of topazes. Diamonds—if had diamonds for that one night to flash at the ball, you'd never fret for jewels again. And, as kissed your warm throat, I thought of a plan.

"You never said one word of it," she whispered.  
"I meant to tell you, in the afterwards which never came. This was my plan. Old Alice Perrin, where I'd been staying, had a necklace, a beauty. If flashed across my silly, love-sick soul that she would lend it to me. I meant to bring them to the ball for you, and see your joy. A mad idea."

"But you never——"  
"I did not want to disappoint you, if I failed. I

flew to Mudshire, to find old Alice away, so there was no hope of borrowing. Then, furious with disappointment, as the maid gave me tea, I remembered my one accomplishment. I knew the old wardrobe where the necklace was kept—at was often lying there for weeks without being looked at. I could slip the lock, take the things off to you, and bring them back and slip them in without any one being the wiser. I ran upstairs to Alice's room. The lock was childish! In five minutes I'd got the case in my hands, and then, as the fates willed that all things were to be against me, instead of going downstairs, I dropped from her low window and ran off—there was barely time to catch my train back to you. And—the maid saw me drop out—she had never told me Miss Perrin's brother was staying in the house, and that he had the key of the wardrobe. Directly he came he went upstairs to see if they were safe. He was a fussy old man, and had the things on his mind. He believed it to be a theft, and then came the hue-and-cry. I was followed, tracked, caught close to Dulverton, with the diamonds in my pocket, on my way to you and the ball."

"You forget"—Evelyn spoke coldly now—"you were not coming to the dance."

"So fate weaves. Damning fact—I had forgotten my dress clothes. So it was clear I meant to take the train to London and run away. Yet, rest assured, Evie, I would have borrowed a suit, and clasped the necklace about your throat.

"Now the rest of this story is unfortunately



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"Now the rest of ~~this~~ story . . .

"Not properly," he went on. "Stunned at first by the array of facts which my folly had pieced together, I did not know what to say. I stammered out it was a joke, and old General Pettin's look made me see where I stood. I shall never forget the agony of that arrest. I was heavily in debt; my bare guilt seemed clear as day, my guardians cast me aside in horror, the girl I loved——"

"You were a thief! Evelyn got up, swaying a little. "You never said one word of this."

"But I meant to. I spent my first day in prison fairly easy—I meant to tell it all and be forgiven. If you had come to me and you understood, I would have told my story and perhaps have been believed. Old Alice would have forgiven me—she cried over my fall. She wrote me foolish, piteous letters; assured me that, if her brother had not been there, I might have kept her jewels. Then, instead of you, came old Uncle Hugh, raving as he cast me off. I was a man who had basely stolen from an old friend to pay his debts, a thief and an outcast. All day I'd watched for you, started at every stir, waited for the rustle of your dress, the warmth of your arms about my neck, the hand with my ring on it in mine—my wife. I meant to tell you, and then the sudden fog would clear—the ache of the stunning blow die away. I sat a mere wretched boy, sure that you would come. You might scold me, blame me as a mad fool; but you could not fail me. Through the bitterness of the chill about me the certainty of your love pierced as the sun. And—what was the reality? Uncle

Hugh storming at the thief, not over sure his own character would ever be cleared from the smirch of that one visit to prison, and carrying a letter from you—my love—urging me to repentance for the sin which I had never committed. I read it twice—those cold, hard words, with their embroidery of trite commonplace. 'Never meet again. Pray for me. Beg me for her sake to repent.' They were stamped on my brain when I tore the paper up. I think I went mad then—that letter licked up my last morsel of common sense. From that moment I was dumb, careless of what any one believed, refusing to speak to any one, to discuss the matter with the solicitor they sent to me, listening as they piled up the evidence and made the case so clear, listening with a bitter, hopeless smile—the memory of that trial scorches still. There stood this sullen sinner, betrayer of an old and kind friend. This thief must be made an example of by a judge who, lenient, he said, to the prisoner's youth, gave him five years' penal servitude. Put on the black cap and sentenced him to the death of imprisonment. And I, in my mad fit of pique against life, laughed as I heard it—laughed at the kindly old man, who, I believe, understood and was sorry for me. Your name was scarcely mentioned."

"You became a felon"—she clasped her hands—"wore prison clothes."

"Yes. And remember, if you had chosen to believe in me, I might never have worn them; the letter turned a living man to stone. Think of it, Evie, what it was in that prison. Your real

criminal has had the satisfaction of having done something. He had plans in his head for futurity. I was a dead man, eating, working, moving among the living. Then, as the numbness passed, a sullen, bitter creature raved against each hour of prison-dom; flung at the walls, and struck them in his impotence; wore out his stock of health, and went, too weak to stand, to the peace of the sick ward. I met Jim there"—he nodded towards the window, forgetting that Evelyn did not know of the burglar—"he, little sinner, gave me the first word of pity which melted the ice about my heart. 'Rough luck, Duke, for a young bloke like you,' he said. We talked in whispers, despite regulations. Then my time passed—I got out, a ticket-of-leave man. There was no word from you—I came from the prison gates to a silent, friendless world. Uncle Hugh sent me over money—two hundred pounds—and bade me emigrate. I tried for work at first, but the prison brand burns. Gaol-birds are not wanted. And then—I grew tired of trying—I took out my little stock of gold, bought these horses, and came down here to play the gentleman, to have a rest before——" He paused.

"Before what?" she whispered, afraid of his set face.

"Before I carry out what I mean to do when this rest is over." He smiled his whimsical smile at her, and smoked quietly. "Then I met you, saw the horrified suspicion on your face, and knew how low I had fallen—lost the short peace I hoped for. But, Evie, I have told you the truth. Do

you believe it?" He leant closer. The light shone on her fair hair, on her soft neck where it rose from the lace of her dressing-gown. There was a new look in his eyes—almost of hope.

Evelyn, her head in her hands, sobbed and turned away. She did not know what to believe then in her surprise and misery.

"Truth's a very naked lady. Perhaps I should have dressed her to introduce you. I see you don't know her." The soft look was dying out of his face. "Well . . . I could never have given you the things you want. I see you've a string of pearls on. You sleep in them, no doubt, that they may keep their warmth and colour. Evie!"—he stared at her bared white throat—"there are moments in a man's life when all that's good in him dies. This is one of them. Oh, I'm your handiwork, and I could catch the throat I loved to kiss and squeeze the intolerant life out of it."

"Ernest!" she cried, and shrank away.

"Don't be afraid, Evie. The grip would turn to a caress, and I'd kiss away the finger-marks. You shiver again."

Evelyn's head drooped—she shivered then, because the memory of those kisses was sweet. Love was dead to her, but she remembered—the tale had moved her strangely—the scent of may seemed to come to her, the sweet softness of still nights, and the capture of two who loved. For years she had steeled herself—drowned memory in blackness; now the steel bands hurt, the drowned thing rose a white, entreating hand from its muddy bed.





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She could not believe him—she was afraid to; but the intolerance was dead in her voice as she came nearer him.

"Ernest!" He started, it was the second time she had used his name. She still thought he was there to steal to take jewels from these people, that he might start life but she thought it now with a great pity and a longing to save him. "Ernest, if moments live with you, go away to-morrow, early. Leave this house and my friends. I'll help you later if I can. Oh, promise me and go. I shall be rich when I marry."

His smile might have warned her. "You act badly, Evie. I see what you mean. You think I'm here playing the gentleman—I may steal. By Heaven, why not make your opinion good," he muttered to himself, touching the case.

"Oh, no!"—she was crying now. "No. Oh, go away from here."

"You plead—to save me from a crime." He laughed. "Oh, Evie, Evie! blind in your righteousness. Well, you shall decide. There's fortune in my hand, or oblivion before me. Evie"—he touched her arm—"for the sake of May memories, could you kiss me once?"

"Oh, no—no!" She shrank away. "It would be wrong."

Yet, if he had known, she looked at his firm mouth and memory grew hotter.

"I'm a felon—but I was different in the long ago. Not once, Evie? Not once, for memory's sake, and to save me?" He touched the case again.

"Oh, no—no!" she whispered so earnestly that a wiser man might have seen how she wavered.

"Be it so then," he said bitterly. "You good women, what rigid lines you draw—tight lines that souls may slip along them. There are moments, my girl, when wrong may save a soul and stern right murder it." He turned away, his head sunk below his shoulders.

Evelyn's head sank on her hands, tears dripped through her fingers—miserable tears, which she checked with an effort, striving to go back to her hard disbelief. What if this long tale were true? If she had felt his lips on hers and come to life again? There was fear, too, mixed with her thoughts. Her future, solid and assured, tottered. She wanted to see those mad fetters in the flames—to know the evidence of her folly was gone. There had been no such great prate of goodness in the past. She saw herself back at Dulverton, a loving girl, engaged to Ernest Hampshire, whose uncle meant to provide for him and give him work. She remembered from her childhood her passionate love of jewels, her longing as she stared through windows at the flashing many-coloured things. It all came back—the gift of the white brocade, the petulant desire for diamonds, Ernest's sudden departure, her dressing for the ball, coming downstairs and forgetting her lack of glittering gems as she saw herself in the long glass. And then, no Ernest to take her—no Ernest at the ball . . . and the crash. The uncle, stern and wrathful, coming to her, telling her she must prepare herself for awful news.

Ernest was a thief—Hugh Hampshire told the tale  
furiously.

The whole sordid story came out, with such solid  
weight of evidence that all hope of his innocence  
was left from her. Her own aunt, a matter-of-  
fact Englishwoman, told her simply to forget the  
boy. There was no suggestion of her going to him  
as he lay in jail, no plea anywhere that he was  
not a despicable thief. The girl had not been  
altogether to blame. With Hugh Hampshire and  
her aunt directing she wrote that fatal letter. The  
true commonplaces were there, put in, as they  
thought, mercifully. From that she heard no  
more, though with wide eyes she read the shameful  
trial, shuddered at the mention of her own name,  
and then knew that Ernest was indeed dead to her  
—learned to feel resentment towards him for the  
disgrace he had brought upon her.

Now, five feet away from her, a torrent of doubt  
seethed in Ernest's brain. What should it be?  
Should he prove this woman right? be a thief in  
earnest? Why not? his embittered soul cried.  
What did anything matter? He had told her the  
truth, and she had not believed. He looked round  
at her. What was she thinking of? Humanity,  
or the Bebbie jewels? Then his head went up.  
The mad mists cleared. No matter what the girl  
thought. There was his own conscience, and the  
people who had been kind to him. He must send  
Evelyn to bed, and replace the jewels before there  
was any fuss. "Evie," he said gently. He must  
send her away.

The little clock chimed one. A big grandfather in the hall boomed it deeply.

"Yes." She raised her white face, afraid of this new note in his voice.

"Evie, you must go to bed—at once. Good night!"

She got up slowly, shading her tear-stained face.

"Don't cry, my dear, the past is not worth tears," he said. "Ah, what's that?"

"There's some one coming up the back stairs—between me and my room," she whispered. "I can't be seen out here with you like this. Oh, what shall I do?" They looked round. Evelyn's room was beyond the door opening on to the back stairs; she could not hope to get across in time.

"Quick—here!" He pulled her to the jutting screen, outside his own door. "You must slip across when they've gone. Quickly!" He stood with her. And he frowned himself, for, as Evelyn disappeared, Marvin yawning, and, somewhat peevish, came to Lady Elverton's door, and went in. How could he put the case back now?

"Now, Evie, run," he whispered.

But there were other sounds—the bridge-players were coming to bed. The girl wrung her hands, and muttered. They were trapped.

"What shall I say?" she whispered. "Oh, what can I do?"

Begbie's form rose above the others.

"Yes, you see my lead was right, as I said."

"Slip into my room until they go to bed. No? Well, here then." He pushed her behind the thick



## CHAPTER X

### LIAR AS WELL AS THIEF

MARVIN'S shrieks rang on; incoherent and hysterical, she hammered and beat the air, surrounded in a minute by the four from downstairs; and it was possibly the stilted exit of Mr. Begbie and his equally stilted return with a full water-jug which brought her to coherency.

Then one word, "Emeralds! Emeralds!" rang through the night.

"Help! Police! The emeralds!" shrieked Marvin, as she found her tongue.

"Not gone—not gone!" Lady Elverton's shriek rivalled her maid's in volume.

"Gone—stolen, m'lady! Burgled!"

The heavy curtains quivered. For a second's space a white face peered from their folds.

"My dear, I advised the bank—I advised the bank," moaned Sir Henry.

Lady Elverton was sufficiently feminine to cease screaming and turn roundly upon her husband, with several scathing suggestions concerning people who were too wise.



Freddie fell to shaking Marvin gently, and the distracted maid poured out her tale.

She had watched every night afraid of her life, but to-night, feeling ill, she had gone for a little plain supper—a bit of beef or cheese, and a left sweet or two, and a drop of ch—that is, beer—and got talking down there. Now, coming up, she thought she heard a stir in the corridor and a door shutting. She had gone in to poke her ladyship's fire, and then looked round as usual for the flat case below the silken tails. It was gone—vanished—stolen, wailed Marvin. "Oh, they lay heavy on my chest—they never will again." She fell to weeping bitterly.

"They're not gone. You've mislaid them, woman!" They dashed into Lady Elverton's room, ransacked the pretty table, pulled out dresses ruthlessly; but Marvin was right—the emeralds were stolen.

Beghie, a thin finger on his lip, stood thoughtfully at the door.

Lady Elverton, having shaken her pale blue eider-down, returned to the corridor sobbing bitterly.

"Ring, Freddie—ring!" she gasped.

Freddie, his finger on a knob, rang frantically and James came running up.

Every one wanted everything at once—the police, or detective from London—and no one did anything except talk loudly.

Marvin accused the love-sick James of having tempted her with cold beef. Sir Henry muttered about the ring. Freddie rang on solemnly.

Behind her heavy shelter Evelyn Gervaise fumed.

in bitter anger. It was all so clear to her—she had been right in her opinion. Her one-time lover had taken the emeralds, had justified her suspicions, and she had allowed him to come among her friends and rob them. Suspicion was certainty to her, as she crouched, afraid each moment that some one might pull the curtains apart and find her there. What explanation should she give them?

Listening also, his face close to the door, the lights switched off in his room, Reeves cursed the hour he had seen Claxton, raved at his folly in not having left the case on the leads. Now, with men in the very house, down from London, what hope would he have of evading discovery? He must try to get away at once, before they found him out. Now he must out and show himself. He fumbled at his collar, tearing it off.

Violet, in a white dressing-gown, came flying downstairs, questioning wildly. She had heard voices, but not hothered. Oh, poor auntie! Custom took her straight to Floyd's side, as he rang on mechanically; but he did not turn his head.

"Stop ringing, Freddie!" she commanded.

Freddie merely changed his finger, remarking, with dignity, that he presumed there was some reason in this desire to ring.

Then Reeves, in a loose smoking-coat, his collar off, came swiftly out.

"What on earth is up?" he began. And they rushed at him, crying out the tragedy.

"Robbed!" He looked round. "How did the man come in?"

"If he came in!" Begbie's cold voice cut across the turmoil.

"He must have come in," answered Reeves quietly.

Freddie ceased ringing to applaud

"Got it in a nutshell. Course he must," he said cheerfully, prodding up the chimney with a poker. "Get a bit sooty this way, wouldn't he?" he added thoughtfully, removing himself from a soft black rain.

"The lobby window" Reeves started suddenly. His hands, groping for Violet's ring, had got covered with grit, and he had forgotten to wash it off. He shoved them into his pocket with a quick gesture, and caught Begbie's cold eyes upon him. Then he ran across. It was clear as day now—the cut-out pane, the lifted catch, there was even a tiny piece of cloth caught upon a nail outside.

Sir Henry wailed for his lost ideals, as he stood holding the neatly cut glass in his hands.

"Must have been a small man," said Freddie, eyeing the hole carefully. "Quite a dwarf, in fact. What—oh, he didn't come through there?"

"You see, he put in his hands, undid the fastenings," said Reeves, "shd up the window, and walked across."

With an "Oh!" of enlightenment Freddie stepped back.

"Slipped into Lady Elverton's room," concluded Reeves.

"How was he aware of the room?" said Begbie sharply.

"How are burglars aware of anything? He had probably crouched outside, and watched Lady Elverton come and go for the last week. The trade spare no trouble when a big thing's on. Then he went out again." Reeves bent forward, and brought back grimy hands. "And if you run down, you'll find footmarks below—but none you'll trace. He'll wear flat-soled shoes, a size too large. But how black these leads are!" He held up his fingers.

Lantern armed, James sped into the night, Sir Henry with him. The others stood staring at the window.

"I don't know what we should have done without you, Mr. Reeves," said Lady Elverton plaintively. "You seem to find out everything."

"To know it all by intuition, as it were," said Begbie. "Yes, precisely." His voice was so self-possessed amongst the others.

The curtains quivered again. Evelyn caught the cold jar in Begbie's voice.

"Hi!" A voice rang up from the darkness, and they crowded to the window, opening it, the lantern was dancing, seemingly alone, outside.

"There are no footmarks—not one," said Sir Henry.

Reeves smiled. Jim was too clever to leave a track; he had leapt from the low roof to the gravel, and then ran off on the grass.

"The flower-border is broad, but no one's jumped on it. No ladder's been put up."

"Then, come in, Henry, and don't get a chill,"

cried Lady Elverton promptly. "Don't stay there messing."

"No footmarks." Begbie was writing methodically in a note-book.

"None," boomed up the voices from the night. As they all grouped round the window Evelyn stole out, and was half-way across the corridor when Begbie and Violet, turning simultaneously, saw her.

"I thought I heard a noise," she said lamely.

"I came to see."

"You almost might have," remarked Violet. "I thought some one had been murdered. How did you steal out, Evie?"

"Yes. I thought your room was over there—in fact it is. How did you slip so quietly?" Begbie looked at her inquiringly. She was white and shivering, her eyes wide with fear and sorrow. Some one quite different from cold, haughty Evelyn Gervaise.

Her voice shook as she muttered something. Sir Henry stared at her in amazement and suddenly met Floyd's eyes. What was wrong with this self-possessed woman to make her stammer and shiver as a guilty child? Gathering self-control, she came across to Reeves, who was standing alone by the window.

"So the necklace is stolen?" she said coldly. "Is really gone?"

"Yes, it appears so," he said sharply, and felt his cheeks flame.

"Liar—as well as thief," she shot out softly.

"Neither," he said very simply and sadly, with so much truth in his voice that she stood, scarcely knowing what to believe.

*Harold Begbie shut his note-book.*

"I should imagine we ought to go too," he said tersely; "and, Evelyn, I should be glad of the jewels, as usual."

"They are surely safe to-night; the man will not come back," she answered impatiently.

"I prefer to have them"

She went to her room, coming back to pour the glittering heap into his lean hands, in a tangled mass of beauty, making him exclaim at her carelessness. Then by degrees the corridor emptied, and such sleep as they could win came to them all. No one could rest. For Evelyn sat wide-eyed through the night, and Reeves paced tirelessly up and down his room, *sorrowing for the end of his brief holiday*, sorrowing, too, for the suspicion which might come on him—must come, if he were recognised as Hampshire, a convicted thief. Prison should never close its door on him again. If there were news of a man from London, he meant to slip away disguised, or, if that failed, there was the swift mercy of the bullet, and he sighed drearily.

Violet St. Maur came down to breakfast next morning in a blue blouse which she had been reserving for London. Blue was Freddie's favourite colour. The feeling of utter blankness had deepened during the night; but she never doubted her power to bring her little lover back, filled with penitence.

upset, was breakfasting upstairs. She had searched her room all right.

Begbie, stiff, and yellow of complexion, came in. He breakfasted frugally off gravenuts, which he crunched cheerlessly, and some patent bread.

"You are leaving the matter to local hands?" he said, as Sir Henry consulted him. "I think you are almost right."

"Reeves, you need not go to-day," Sir Henry turned to him. "Why not stay here for a little longer,"

Reeves drew a long breath. If no London detective came, he was safe for a day or two longer. He might find opportunity to put back the emerald, and his disguises were ready at Barham. Some instinct had made him provide himself with wigs and seedy clothes.

"I'd like to stay," he said pleasantly—"for a day or two."

"Remember, I'm coming to tea with you on Saturday." Violet was eyeing the back of Freddie's head with amazed anger. "You must be back for that."

"I shan't forget," he said quietly. "Yet, I expect I shall be back by then."

"I cannot understand why you don't get a top-hole fellow down," remarked Freddie. "Chap who'd see you'd been to bed day before yesterday, and what soap you'd used in your tub, don't-cher-know—Sherlock Holmes tip. Lots of 'em about, aren't there?"

"I—don't want to," Sir Henry's tone was un-

happy. He looked up as Evelyn, white and weary, came into the room. "Somehow, I think we may get these things back."

Reeves thought of the flat case in his pocket. Get them back! How? He might drop them in the woods, and some one dishonest might come along and find them. He might, even still, rip up that piece of green fire, and make a home for himself with the proceeds "

"I am in hopes of getting them back," repeated Sir Henry. "Tea Evie or coffee, or both?" He filled two cups promptly, put a generous supply of boiled milk in the tea, creamed the coffee; and pushed both over to her.

Evelyn was not hungry, she drank a little coffee absently, and scarcely spoke. Now and again she glanced miserably at Reeves.

"Evelyn, I am going to London to-day," Begbie chewed a last piece of tough bread. "I find I have some business there. I shall probably return to-morrow, and do not forget that on Friday all the unset stones will be here, and you must arrange as to settings, etc. I remind you, as you might have some idea of hunting."

"I have none," she said dully. "I shall be here."

Ernest Reeves finished his breakfast more easily, Begbie, whom he dreaded vaguely, was going to London. Sir Henry would trust to local people—there were policemen already in the house. He had a few days before him.

Smiling a little, looking round the pleasant fire-lit room as a man condemned to death may look



upset, was breakfasting in her room all right.

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He breakfasted frugally  
crunched cheerlessly, and

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muffled in a dark ulster, of stuff so stiff and heavy it looked as if it had been tailored out of wood. There were labels tied carefully on to every package. He explained to the expectant James that he would be back on Friday. Evelyn, pale and dejected, was seeing him off. When the car had hummed away, she turned to Reeves. His blood grew hot at the look in her face.

"There are other trams," she said haughtily, pointing to the door.

"Possibly." He strolled to the great log fire.

"And you will leave by one," she commanded, "and—leave something behind," she added.

"No, Evie—Miss Gervaise!"—his whimsical smile lighted his sad face—"I have a day or two still to spend here."

"But, the emeralds?" she whispered. "Oh, it was you, and some one will suspect."

"Rest assured," he said coldly, "that Lady Elverton will never lose her jewels through me."

She stared at him, twisting her hands about, afraid for him—afraid for herself. What if she went straight to Sir Henry and betrayed this man? Something, which was not fear held her. She could not do it—walk in and say, "Sir Henry, Mr. Reeves is a liberated thief, he is here among us to steal." Then the inevitable question, "Why did you not tell us before?" The answer, "He was once a friend of mine—once my lover." Then inevitable discovery, perhaps the exposing of her mad, loving letters, with their tale of folly glaring from the page.

Reeves seemed to read her thoughts.

his last on life, he strolled out with Floyd to where these stolen scenes of the law were carefully tramping out any possible traces on the sodden grass—the heavy rain had washed out the rest. Jim, the crackman, had left no traces of his midnight visit.

"Some man from London—the local constable patted down noses which could only have been concerning the wet ground for there was little else to note. He slips down in a motor and he goes, and there's an end of him."

The head constable of the county was flying up in a motor; the world was a jar at the loss of the emeralds.

Violet in turn shook some dirt across the grass. "Sopping," she said, looking at Freddie who at other times would have overwhelmed her with loving soddings—but now he looked absently if unhappily, at the pretty pinched feet and said it was rather silly.

Thus from her Freddie—the blankness settled more deeply about Violet. She dug one pointed toe into the mud, hurt almost bewildered. What if, in grasping for the shadow she had lost the substance? if Freddie had taken her decision as really final and it would be her part to humble herself before their engagement was renewed? There was a turquoise and diamond brooch which she had wanted to put on that morning, but could not, as Freddie had given it to her; that in itself was annoying.

Begbie was starting just as Reeves went in—

the precious ten minutes in the conservatory, when they smoked together.

"Bad luck--hounds not being out to-day," said Floyd. "Master's sister dead, and the day runs long before us."

"I had better go to Barham to see if the scrubber has stolen all my spoons, and how the horses are." Reeves took up a cap. "I'll be back to lunch."

He was going, not to Barham, but to Bateson's cottage, to see if the little man had left.

"Those mushrooms told their tale," he said to himself as he went out. "I knew then that something was up."

The day was warm and soft, a pale sun shining, the wind from the south. Turning in the avenue, he looked back at Claxton wistfully. So solid and so homelike, with its quaint jutting windows and long stone terrace. Below this was a streak of turf, pock-marked by bare brown flower-beds—but only sleeping in their bareness, for sundry sticks and labels told that April would see them aflame with tulips or sweet heavy hyacinths. The gardens, brick-walled and sheltered, were close by. A typical old English home, where a man might drowse away his life in sweet contentment.

Home! What a word to a wanderer who could never hope for one; who must go, in a week or so, to labour with his hands, to earn the right to live, or, with one sharp pull and flash; pass from endless striving to endless peace. That was what would have been if fate had not led him to Claxton, with its jewel-robber. Now he had worse to fear—

"Going straight to Sir Henry, to cry the gaol-bird down?" he said lightly.

"No," she said sullenly, "not if you go away."

"Or if I stay! You are afraid, Evie. I've only a day or two in the old world I loved so well. Let me be in it. Sir Henry, for some reason, is letting trained men stay away; but the emeralds are too good things to pass unnoticed. We'll have men from London down as the story spreads, and . . . they will know me. I mean to slip away directly there is word of one, for I, amongst other people in the house, would be questioned. Vanity has prevented me disguising myself with a mop of grizzled hair about my mouth and cheeks; the convict will stand revealed. So don't be nervous. My time is short. Ah, here is the butterfly, and her now reluctant swain."

Violet, in an extremely bad temper, assuring the world in general that she would not change her wet shoes, even if her lungs did go wrong, and peering out of the tail of a resentful eye at callous Freddie, came in. She held her toes to the fire to steam; she intimated that she was dying for a motor drive, and Freddie merely looked before him, quietly sad and hopeless. She did not want him; why then worry his wilful little love. He was almost unaware of the constant care and love he had surrounded her with. How he would have prayed her to change her shoes, and quaked for days afterwards if she even sniffed. How he had watched and feared lest any one should interrupt

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suspicion, arrest, years of fresh torture behind prison walls. What if they came upon him now? Would all the protestations on earth avail him, with that case in his coat-pocket?

"Wrench out the big stone. Send back the others. Take your chance and go," whispered Evil, dancing by his side along the country road. "Evelyn has driven you to it. Why hesitate?"

He shrugged his shoulders and strode on. The other pocket held the little shining weapon which could always save him from prison. Putting down his hand he fingered it and chuckled. Life was strong in him. The bitter hopelessness of years had faded and he knew he could be happy if the chance were given to him. There was power in him still to feel anger and to feel love—love for the woman who thought him a common thief.

Bateson's cottage lay back from the road, a damp creeper-covered little spot, with neat beds in front, a plot carefully tilled with small beds of one and, and a range of little glass houses and frames. There was no one about, not any sign of the cottage being vacant, for the door was open and a fire burnt in one of the rooms. No one went in. Looking at the little beds it would be laughed softly. Jim, the truckman, had worked on that one does not plant radishes out. It is a February, not yet geraniums in flower beds. A parcel stood in the open doorway, the paper about it was torn, and he saw it was full of mushrooms—the quick growth was captured. But where was the man himself?

"Bateson," he cried softly. "Bateson. Hallo, there! I've come from Claxton. Bateson. Jim, It's I—the Duke."

No answer. He turned to look round the frames and houses, and started back with a sick qualm of fear at his heart. For, peering from some trees just outside the gate, he saw a face, and knew it instantly for that of Fitson, the man who had come to see Sir Henry, and who knew Ernest Hampshire, the convict.

Had Fitson, then, tracked him there? Was everything to end now with the accursed case in his pocket? He drew swiftly back into the shadow of the porch, and saw the bushes stir as if the man was coming out.

The cottage was single, he could see straight out to the back. There was a little yard there, full of flower-pots and seed-boxes, another patch of garden, and then bare fields as far as Barham Woods. But just outside the yard the road ran between high walls. He might, as the watcher came out, drop across the wall into the lane and get back past the gate in front unnoticed.

A kind of scullery butted out on the yard; he dodged into that, and saw a bicycle, its dirty tyres coated with red mud. One look back from the front—the man was in the bushes still; but he had parted them, and was coming slowly out. Reeves caught the rusty bicycle, dropped it softly over the wall, and followed himself, just as Fitson opened the wicket and came stealthily to the open door. Reeves hopped on the old machine, his knees in





They would bury him, and tongues would wag over his grave. His hand touched the revolver, he stepped back, and there was in his mind how a hunted beast must feel when he turns at bay, with the pack howling, inevitable as death, up the field.

"Why, Reeves, taking a morning stroll?" Jack Payne's pleasant face looked over the steering-wheel. "You seem out of breath too. What—seedy, eh? Steady."

For Reeves, his breath coming fast, felt his face turn lead colour, his heart sink. Payne's arm went round him, holding him up, trees and skies sped round in dark whirl.

"Haven't a flask either." A voice miles away was regretting something. "There, hold up, old chap—hold up."

The voice grew nearer. The whirl grew slower and condensed slowly, to a strip of empty country road, a low hedge in front, and a kindly man by his side.

He began to apologise weakly.

"I ran a bit—it's cold, and then—don't know what came over me, I feel so queer."

"Pity I didn't catch you before. I saw a chap on a bicycle, but no one walking. Are you still at Claxton, or going home? I'll take you either way."

"I'm still at Claxton. It's lonely in there until—at Barham—the servants come. Thanks ever so, if you'll take me back."

"I want to go there," said Payne, "to condole with poor Susie. This thing is getting too much."

Still safe, still undiscovered, with the emeralds

in his pocket, Reeves was whirled back to Clifton, and Evelyn chanced to meet him at the door, Violet with her.

"How was your scrubber?" The butterfly's wings drooped to-day. What use to flutter when no pursuer follows with a net.

"I did not see her," he said wearily. "I did not go to Barham."

"And—how tired you look."

"Tired!" Payne burstled in. "I'm just ringing for the strongest peg in the house for him. I found him panting and fainting outside Barham walls. Lucky I came along."

It was Violet who took the amber drink from James, and fluttered about Reeves until he smiled half gratefully. Evelyn, cold and still, seemed to care little whether he lived or died.

"I was running," he said, as the strong spirit forced some colour into his face.

"Running," Evelyn repeated the word quickly.

"And where on earth did you get a great smear of red mud upon you?" cried Violet, pointing to his long stocking. "You couldn't have been as far as Monkshill."

"I was no farther than Bateson's cottage," he said, with cheeks as red now as they had been pale. "I suppose I got it there, looking at the garden."

Evelyn bit her lips wearily. She felt that something had happened, but did not know what it could be.

"Didn't know that clay ever passed my place," said Jack Payne carelessly. "You know we

rather hoped that piece of evidence would run our robber in—his wheels sunk inches into it as he rode off. But, bless you, of course he washed the thing at once. Oh, Lady Elverton, I am sorry to hear we are companions in sorrow."

Lady Elverton, wearing black, appeared sadly at the door. She was fretting deeply for her loved jewels.

"Henry won't do anything," she said petulantly "but Colonel Halsworthy assures me we'll have half a dozen people here in a day or two. They must be found—somewhere."

"I think they will," said Reeves quietly.

"And I'm sure of it," broke in Sir Henry, his eyes on Evelyn.

It seemed a mad notion; but he suspected Evelyn.

## CHAPTER XI

### A WIRE FROM LONDON

JACK PAYNE stayed to luncheon. There was an unrest about the usually pleasant meal, for letters and wires arrived incessantly, and Sir Henry, on opening them, invariably tried to answer both at once, so that there were constant respectful returnings of James, asking if Sir Henry meant to put "My dear Judd" in one wire, or to sign himself "Yours faithfully" in another, all this necessitating new letters and telegrams being written, devoid of mistakes, until a fresh batch came in.

London, Paris, Vienna, countless smaller cities were being watched; every known fence and receiver was being warned and put under observation. For months the most innocent salesman of an emerald would be liable to suspicion.

Already an unsuspecting country gentleman had suffered indignity and questioning. The newspapers were filled with the tale of the theft; the police—worthy men—were, as usual, credited with the holding of innumerable clues.

"A Thief in a Motor." The leaded headlines of *The Daily Agitator* summed the case up as if all were over—wrote a fanciful description of the car

shooting through the silent night; of the altered number as it neared Claxton; of the thief, who was also apparently a rich man, sauntering coolly to the scenes of his crime, and as coolly flitting off, to take the road to London and hum back, laughing at the fools who sought for him.

"Let them look for the Claxton burglar in some flashy tripper, who flirts with the maids and tips the groom until he gathers the information he wants."

They read all this, impressed by the cool certainty of the editor who made the whole thing so simple.

"It must be discovered," the pressman wrote. Suspected men were closely followed. When the burglar made his next midnight trip he would without doubt be arrested.

In the meantime, Lady Elverton was prostrated by her loss, and the little hamlet of Claxton hummed like a busy hive of bees robbed by a passing wasp! *The Daily Agitator* did not lack metaphor.

Luncheon was not devoid of other incident. It revealed the agitated lack of appetite of Miss St. Maur, who merely crumbled a little toast, saying she felt ill, while her over-ready tongue flashed out all kinds of reckless statements, with too evident watching of her eyes for the effect.

She was going off to stop with Effie Lindley Deane. Floyd winced a little, but said nothing. Effie had asked her before, but she had never gone. Miss Violet might have added because she was sternly forbidden to, for the house of Effie Lindley Deane bore a strange name. There were tales of



"Yes, old boy." Reeves's voice was full of gentle sympathy.

"Y—You've seen, perhaps——" Freddie stammered, as men do, when a longing for sympathy drives them to a half unwilling confidence. "Last night—I was short with Vi. Oh, I know you meant nothing, old chap—I know a good fellow when I see one; but she—broke off our engagement, because I said just one word"

"And—is most anxious to renew it," said Reeves drily

"What!" Freddie bounced in his chair. "You think so?" Then he sat back again dejectedly. "No," he said quietly. "No, Vi doesn't care—that's the truth of it. You see, I've thought of nothing else but her for years, thinking she would come to me at last, and I believed that, below all her jeers, she was fond of me. Last night it was somehow borne in on me that I'd been a fool"

"Perhaps," said Reeves gently, "you were sensible for the first time in your life"

"Thank you," murmured Freddie humbly.

"I only mean to the girl you are fond of. Forgive my plain speaking, Floyd, but Miss St. Maur is one of the butterflies who never value a man until they think they are about to lose him. Her shallow little thoughts were plain to read this morning—she expected you to come begging for forgiveness, as you have always done."

"She has said a dozen things to wound me to-day," said Freddie miserably.

"Rather to attract your attention, and sting



you to repentance. Stick to it, old boy, and think a day or two may see a great difference."

"God grant it may, for I am a very wretched little fellow," said Freddie earnestly.

"Be neither stung nor flattered into taking a notice. Oh! who's this? Begbie—back so soon."

The lean man came slowly into the room.

"Yes—I finished my business very quickly, and I decided I was wanted here. I go up again to-morrow," he said stiffly, looking sharply at Reeves. "Been in all day, Mr. Reeves?"

"No, I was out this morning."

"Ah!" There was a curious inflection in Begbie's voice, and Evelyn, who had followed him in, shuddered suddenly.

Violet, who had been fuming in the hall, came in clamouring for a walk. "The day was so fine, why waste it in the house?" She fussed, driving them off for boots and coats, and then out first to the stables to see the horses.

*Hotspur*, of course, received the first visit. A low, slashing bay, with more than a hint of temper in his head. Fit as hands could make him, his coat threw off a bloom, his supple skin worked over lumps of muscle; his legs were wonderfully clean, showing few signs of work.

Reeves had been riding him, the horse taking to him at once—so much so, that he turned now and let his rider pet him, a great condescension on his part. Violet had spent hours trying to get the chaser to allow her in, and failed signally.

"We'll win to-morrow, Brown," said Reeves.

cheerily to the groom. "It will take hot stuff to best this fellow—he gallops like an express train."

"The way he goes for you, it will, indeed, sir. Captain Hanbury rode him well, but he pulled him about, and the horse didn't always give all he could. Never you touch him with the stick, sir—he can't a-bear that."

"A finish, if it comes to me, must be fought out with knees and hands alone." But a finish, with this horse, was a thing to be avoided. Making his own running throughout, he was capable of winning any race, once cornered, he would not stand a touch of the whip or graze of the spurs, and, having lost several races which he could easily have won, Sir Henry picked him up fairly cheaply to win the Gateshill Hunt Steeplechase. Doing nothing by halves, and quite oblivious of the horse's previous character, Sir Henry had backed Hotspur heavily with half a dozen astute neighbours, and particularly with Jack Payne, who firmly believed that his mare *Goldgirl* would beat the big bay easily. So that the race marked an important event for Claxton, and Reeves, above all things, wanted to win for the bluff, fussy man who had been so kind to him.

A dangerous place for him, perhaps, this race-course, but he meant to ride, even if they took him away a prisoner from the course.

Evelyn's fears had affected his nerves. He shivered a little as the bay was locked up.

There were Freddie's horses, light, useful little thoroughbreds most of them. One, the showy chestnut which Violet loved riding—she wanted it for

Saturday, and skirted round the point, bewailing her own idle lameness, wondering if she would have to borrow one of her uncle's big horses. Freddie, passing on to Bluelight—a horse he hoped to win his fragmental cup with—took no notice, though his heart was heavy as lead, and his generous little heart longed to offer her the horse at once.

The stables inspected, they went to walk aimlessly round the billiard-room windows, searching for some tracks of the thief.

The police had taken the tiny shred of stuff which had been found in the nail, but it was so ordinary a little piece of cloth that it was no clue to them—just a scrap of grey tweed without a pronounced pattern, torn from some cheap shoddy suit. It was very warm in the woods to-day. The winter sun shone out gayly—they were sheltered even from the soft south wind. They wandered, urged on by restless Violet towards the lake, and, as they passed on to the broad walk leading down to it, Reeves saw that Evelyn Gervaise was by his side. She dropped something, stooping to look for it.

"I want to speak to you," she murmured, as he stooped too. "I have not dropped anything."

Pausing, they let the others go on, and turned up a narrow winding path which led back to the house.

"I wanted to speak to you. You are in danger. You had better go away at once." She spoke breathlessly, looking about her as if the hushes held a watcher.

"What do you mean?" he cried, startled.

"What I say. I tell you Harold Begbie suspects

you. He has said nothing, but he went to London for some purpose, and now he watches you so closely. I know it—I tell you, I know it. Oh, Ernest, get away. I could not bear to see you arrested."

"As they are sure to do," he said thoughtfully. "I should not have a chance, but they won't hurt you by arresting me—be assured of that."

"How can you help it?" she faltered. "Oh, you don't know the man. He is so slow and yet so certain in his methods. He will build up every stone in its place before he shows his plans. Go now. Get home to Barham and away."

"When the time comes," he said quietly. "No, I won't run away, Evie. Why make my guilt so apparent? A runaway is a man marked. What memory it would leave behind to these people. I'll face it out, and at the last some people may believe the tale I leave to them. Besides, I must ride this race to-morrow. I have promised Sir Henry."

She entreated him, urged him vainly, stormed at him for what he would bring upon her, wrung her hands in impotent misery.

"You'll risk everything to ride this wretched horse?" she said

"I promised Sir Henry," he said simply. "It is a small return for his goodness to me."

She grew angry then, and he only smiled, so tired a smile—it was sadder than a sob.

"I am minded to have my last day or two here," he said. "Let it be, Evie; they shall never take me again to prison."

"But—the emeralds," she almost wailed.

He grew hot then. The emeralds!

"I tell you, Evelyn, once my love. Had it been for your contempt, for your meeting me with such certain suspicion, I would have faded out of your life even as I came into it, and never troubled you again. But your first greeting, your horrible eyes set all the demon in me awake. 'Oh, you come here to steal,' cries my lady. 'It can be for nothing else.' The felon must be felon still. There was no room for pity for belief in you—saying, 'This man, who loved me once, is out of prison, and means to live cleanly.' Oh no, it was once the jewel thief, always so. And you believe it still. Take care, Evie, perhaps some day you may be sorry. And what if I did steal that might live? Men steal more precious things than jewels in society, and are not sent to prison. His head drooped, he struck sharply at the undergrowth with his stick. "Are you afraid," he said sternly, "for me—or that the glittering things you love so dearly may slip from your grasp because I am here? Is that it?"

Her lips moved, but gave no sound. She could not meet his eyes.

"Yes, that is it. If there is a row, if I am exposed, the old trial may crop up. But why fear? Your name was mentioned, but not your engagement to me."

"Harold would never forgive me for not telling—what you were," she faltered.

"Lie, then, as women lie. Tell him you did not

know—that you only thought I had disappeared,” he said contemptuously. “To lose the right to wear those diamonds and pearls would be indeed a tragedy. For the letters, you shall have them back to burn when I go away—not before. Is it so great a thing, Evie, this life before you—with Harold Begbie?”

“Oh, I was so poor for so long,” she said. “Can not you understand? I was a mere paid companion, and he can give me——”

“All you want,” he interrupted, almost brutally—“money, a home, jewels. Is not that so?”

“He can give me all I want?” But the words were more a question than an assertion, as she whispered them.

All she wanted. She leant against a tree, looking out through a gap in the trees at the rippling sunlit lake. A solid, comfortable house, a motor-car, fine dresses as backgrounds for the priceless jewels, an assured position, and . . . a husband. She put her hand to her throat, for it ached. The lean, dried-up man who would be master, and perhaps even tyrant, whose habits must not be disturbed or upset; who would expect her to conform to his lightest wish, to wear the jewels he desired, and to return them to him to put in the strong-room, with its maze of warning wires, at night. All she wanted. It had been love once—warm arms about her, loving lips on hers—and she had dreamed, contentedly, of a future in a tiny home.

But in the long years of lonely poverty she had changed. The child's love for jewels had grown,

in the woman, to a passion. Half her idle moments were spent staring into jewellers' windows, & longing for the beautiful stones of blue and red & soulless white. Sometimes in strange towns she would go in and pretend to buy, that she might take twinkling diamonds, cold sapphires, red rubies, and changeable opals in her greedy fingers.

Then, from the clouds came her splendid chance. She was to revel in all the things she had longed for with middle-aged Harold Hargreave as her husband.

With every soft feeling beaten down, she had been ready for her wedding, and then Fate, a jade who delights in standing behind doors to fly out with a "Boo!" in startled tones, threw her old lover—the detected thief—across her path, to wreck her peace of mind, to make her atoned for him and for herself, to see her great future shiver and grow dim. Worse, to know she still had power to suffer and to feel. Had her pearls lost their lustre that she plucked them then so unmercifully at night? Had her great diamond lost its fire? But the heavy ring hurt her, and she who had loved to touch it there now put it away when she came to it and her hands were gloved.

"Lvelyn! Lvelyn!" she called, voice raised above the quiet of the woods.

"Yes," she answered, fully and stoutly, looking afraid.

Hargreave's out-drawn breath strongly fluttered and flattered her so softly & manly and hurrying up the

'12'

"I did not know where you had got to, Lvelyn."

and where is Reeves ? " He glanced round excitedly, not seeing the dark figure behind the bend. " Where is he ? " cried Begbie irritably.

" I'm here," said Reeves equably, coming into view. " Want me for anything particular, Begbie ? "

" Ah ! Precisely." The jewel collector drew a long breath. " No, merely I—ah—missed you."

" Awfully nice of you," said Reeves thoughtfully.

" And—why did you not pursue the path to the lake, Evelyn ? " Begbie said sternly, evading Reeves's amused eyes.

She flushed

" It—seemed so cold along there, Harold. Mr. Reeves and I chose the shelter. We were going back to the house "

" It was not in the least cold, I assure you—to be precise, quite warm "

" We also thought"—there was a note of mockery in Reeves's low voice—" we thought, Miss Gervaise and I, that we might find some traces of our burglar. I doubt if this walk was ever searched. Supposing we had lighted upon a footstep ? "

" I do not think you are likely to," said Begbie coldly. " The burglar no doubt '— he spoke with studied carelessness—" is safe in London, and will be caught there."

" Perhaps so." Reeves wondered if his prison friend had slipped away. Poor little, twisted man, who, having sinned for sm's sake, now sinned for love—and the desire to live cleanly.



"A very stale one, I should say," observe Begbie, almost with a sneer. "You're on a wrong one, Fitson. I tell you that much."

"Perhaps so," the little, hard-bitten man nodded equably. "But one must follow something, y see. Have you got your nose on another, Begbie?"

"On a hot one," said the jewel collector drily. Evelyn drew a quick breath. She was right then.

"Oh, yes, on a hot scent," he laughed, in a glib cackle. "I can put two and two together as we Scotland Yard Reeves—" He looked back anxiously, as if he hoped Reeves was some distance behind.

"Mr. Reeves has gone back," Evelyn came trying to steady her voice. "One of the boys called to him, and he ran back. It was Freddie, who called." Chill with fear, she fit women will, bravely, but almost too elaborately.

"Well, good luck to your stale scent," snorted Begbie. "Good evening."

"I'd like to know what his is," muttered the detective, staring after him. "He'll never let me for not finding his lost diamond pin. The Reeves a nice man. McPherson."

"Very, sir. Hunting gentleman," said McPherson. "Rides hard, and killed a horse last meet."

Fitson lost all further interest in Reeves. He was not likely to associate a foxhunter with Hampshire. Also, in his own opinion, the scent followed was hot, and not stale.

He went back towards the gardens. The

only come out to see the billiard-room where it jutted out from the house. McPherson was too full of the robbery to allow his visitor to leave without seeing that.

There was another frightened man close to them. A little black-bearded, twisted figure stepped from the clump of bushes as the two went away, and shook himself in almost comical relief.

"I'd better clear," he muttered. "The old bike gawn, an' this fellow down here. Better clear; but I want a word with the Duke afore I go."

The dusk fell rapidly now, and, skirting from bush to bush, he reached the hall door, wondering if he dared to ring and send in for his friend.

Reeves, slipping round by the shrubberies, got quickly into the house, his nerves jarred by fear. There was time to slip away, but his jaw set obstinately, he would not leave until he had ridden Hotspur, and won the steeplechase for Sir Henry.

Fitson had never seen him, and was clearly not upon his track, or he would have arrested him at once. He must only trust for a day or two to the God-chance which had favoured him so far.

A thin, furtive-looking man crossed the hall as he came in. Reeves wondered who he was, until the loquacious James, who saw him look, immediately volunteered information.

"Mr. Begbie's new vallee, sir—came from Lunnon with him. Never been in a place before, I should say, he seems so strange-like. Tea in the drawing-room, sir. Great clues about the Monkshill burglary, sir,"



must mean the instant arrest of the burglar, and that it must mean also great fame for him. He was becoming sour at the turn events were taking.

"The whole thing is mysterious," Begbie laughed a little. "If this bicycle is covered with the peculiar red mud of Monkshill, and it is the same bicycle the burglar rode, then it shows he is here among us. On the other hand, I must say I wonder where it was kept ever since."

"Fitson is coming to Monkshill to-morrow. I'll send him on to you, Jones, to see the bike," observed Payne.

Jones got up sulkily. He stayed at the front door to receive a comforting drink, and to confide his sorrows in James.

"It was the bike wot I found, and it was important," he said crossly. "Something kept the red mud on—maybe he had it covered."

A small form, crouching in the shadows, moved a little forward.

"'Oo took the bike," murmured Jim. "Oh, I must go—in some noo disguise, too. I must get."

Begbie's lean valet joined the two at the door. The evening light fell full upon his face, and the little man shrank close into his sheltering shrub. He was not troubled for himself now.

"Granby here," he muttered—"in there. Then—they suspect the Duke! Lord! they suspect the Duke!"

His teeth came hard upon his lower lip as he slipped later from tree to tree, until he gained the cover of the woods, and, pausing there, crouched in



## CHAPTER XII

### HOTSPUR'S RACE

THE day of the Gateshill races dawned stormily, with gusts of wind and showers, but by breakfast-time the heavy grey-fringed clouds had edged away, lurking darkly on the horizon, and the sky was a clear blue, brightened by a stoutly shining sun.

Reeves was called early. It was a luxury for him to drink his tea and see his fire catch light, the flames leaping through crackling sticks to catch the shining coal. What do the Americans, with the blue glare flaring through the gas logs, know of a fire's comfort and company?

He knew he was mad to stay, yet he laughed as he lay back under the eiderdown. At any moment Fitson might catch sight of him, and arrest would follow. Who could they suspect except Ernest Hampshire, the jewel thief?

Jim, his twisted friend, was too cunning to leave a trail. His disguises were perfect, and his one conviction had been the result of a fellow thief's treachery.

How the press would thunder at him, if the



to go to, a bright fire to dress by, and liberty about him, knew too well.

There was something hard under his pillow. He pulled the flat case out and opened it. The sun was out by now, and a bright ray, catching the stones, sent rays of quivering green across the white velvet. Flawless, magnificent, the necklace rippled on its bed, with the light diamond setting sending out flashes of red and blue and white.

How easy to rip out a stone or two, leave the rest where they must be found, and slip away. He lay back dreaming, staring at the jewels. Isaacs, the cracksman's friend, would ask no questions. He could afford to wait, or dispose of the stones abroad. And then, the chill little bulldog could go unloaded. There would be money enough to pay a wretched man's passage to Australia, where he could earn enough to live cleanly, a horse between his knees.

Live cleanly! with that theft behind him, with the memory of betrayed friendship to embitter every thought. "You might get rich out there," whispered the jade Temptation in his ear. "Pay them back." Yes, he might easily do that. Rich? He laughed aloud. How long would a stockman, who must clothe himself, take to save that great jewel's price? No. Hope must hide behind a black curtain. It was either the bulldog's cold kiss, or the cruel struggle for work which he had endured before. He might try for a groom's place; to be with the horses he loved. Who would take him without a character? He was not skilled





came on steadily. "No, leave the tray, and mind that revolver, it's loaded—and cocked."

His face grew white, and beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. What if this officious servant insisted, for the tray lay on a corner of the quilt, and the slightest movement would lay the little case bare. He might tell some story, but the thing would look too marked. Reeves's heart sang in his ears. Very stealthily he slipped one hand down, grasping the quilt just above the case.

Begbie's servant stepped back a little hastily.

"Dangerous habit, sir," he murmured, one hand stretched for the tray.

"Very. It's ready for the burglar. Your master will be waiting for you."

There was no excuse to stay after this. The man went out again, stiffly, with none of a trained man-servant's swift noiselessness.

"Queer chap that," murmured Reeves to himself, "and a narrow shave for me. Lord! how Begbie would have come posting down when he heard a jewel-case had been seen on my bed. 'Police! police!' he mocked, jumping up and going off with the emeralds in his dressing-gown pocket.

Time after time he had meant to slip them back, and, finding no opportunity, had kept them still, a menace and a temptation.

In her white-hung, pretty room Evelyn Gervaise was thinking too, as uneasily as Reeves. Her face was white; there were black circles under her tired eyes. Every stir made her start, every raised voice in the house caused her to dread that discovery



"Mad! Mad!" she groaned, watching the sun make a quivering bar across her room, and touch her table to a glitter of silver. Her ring was there, sending out rays from its big stone, prismatic flashes of light.

Putting on a dressing-gown, she got up and picked up the ring. It was magnificent, a huge brilliant almost insolent in its pride of cold, white beauty. Some smaller things lay beside it. Beghie seemed to have given up being afraid now. He had brought her back the blue diamond and the black pearls. He liked to see her wear them. Heavy, lustrous things, those pearls. She slipped their waxy spheres through her fingers. If they were not so valuable, might not people say they were downright ugly, dark as leaden beads? Was not a topaz in cleanly yellow a prettier stone? She put her hand to her throat and winked back some smarting tears. Why should she remember topazes now? The necklace lay at the bottom of an old workbox, a battered and neglected thing, the setting dirty, the stones dull—lay there with a little turquoise ring, its valueless stones green and discoloured.

She slipped the engagement-ring on to her finger; it hung loosely, slipping up and down. She had grown thin lately: the lines under her eyes made her look so much older.

Evelyn put the ring off again impatiently. It was so heavy to wear in the mornings, and she had grown tired now of holding it up to flash and see people turning to stare at the huge brilliant.



breastpiece of smarter check. No horse could have looked fitter; he was a picture as he stood lifting one foot impatiently, as if to show its perfect shape. Hard and not too fine, deep breasted, great back, quarters let down like a greyhound's, and clean flat legs. Given another disposition, there might be a National in such a fine stamp of chaser.

He turned his lean head as Reeves came in, and allowed his rider to pat him, a liberty none of the grooms had ever dared to take. The horse even responded a little, putting his velvety muzzle against the caressing hand.

"They know their friends," said Reeves softly, a world of regret in his voice. He loved these great-hearted, generous friends of man; would have asked nothing more of life than a little home where he could have kept two or three of them—a home with Eve to brighten it, and he had thought once it was to be his.

He sighed bitterly as he turned away. Misfortune, brooding bird of prey, had never shadowed a man more thoroughly. There seemed no reason for the fate which had befallen him, no justice in a power which could inflict such unmerited suffering. They saw Hotspur leave, stepping away with his springy, elastic action, bending his head to the snaffle, as if he had never known temper. Reeves patted him again.

"I'm certain that horse could tell a story," he said. "He looks as if he were afraid of us all. If he could speak, I'm sure there is some pitiless beating, some punishment which broke his generous

art in his past. Every fibre in his t  
look at a whip. 'You beat me too m  
sters,' he says to himself; 'I can los  
ng through it now.' I'd like to take  
ining and hunt him, never letting hi  
spur again."

'You're very fond of horses?' said  
iling.

'I love them, and as a rule they love  
& could do nothing with that chestnu  
Begbie's. He must be mad to have bou  
he knew nothing of for Miss Gervaise."

Violet St. Maur was sitting sulking  
when they went in, staring in bitter rese  
Freddie, who had ensconced himself beh  
paper, and seemed to be deeply interes  
contents—so much so, that he never ev  
at the furious little lady perched upon  
sender-rail.

"Excellent thing, a taste for literature,"  
Reeves gravely, not having failed to notice  
inner sheet of *The Daily Telegraph* was up  
and that Freddie was oblivious of the fac

He had a couple of letters to write. He  
to sell his horses next week. There was  
regret in his heart as he thought of the high-  
grey going to some unkind hands. If Begb  
only buy him, he could have him almost for  
Evelyn would use the horse kindly.

His letters finished, he strolled downstai  
as he did so, Begbie's stiffly jointed man came  
across the corridor, watching Reeves as h

Reeves put the letters on the oak table and turned away. It would soon be time to start for the races. Begbie's man bent quickly to the table, a letter in his hand, and Reeves saw him lay it down, then peer at the address on the other envelopes.

A very curious person, evidently. Well, there were no secrets in his correspondence. But Evelyn, as she saw the man take up the letters and go out with them, felt a fresh qualm of fear. Who was this new man? Harold never took one about with him.

She held out her hands as the man passed her.

"These will catch the first post if we take them to Claxton ourselves," she said, in her cold, slow voice.

"I'm going out, miss—I can post them."

"I will do so." She took the letters quietly and went away, leaving Begbie's man stroking his chin dubiously.

Evelyn looked at the addresses. One was to Tattersall's, one to a livery stable keeper. There could be no secrets in them, but she stamped them herself and sent them out by Marvin.

The motors came gliding round at twelve. Violet, a pretty, petulant little thing in deep blue, with a green quill in her hat, looked at Freddie's car, and looked at the other, and for the first time in her life, with the feeling of blankness growing upon her, felt that she would not choose her seat, but simply be asked to get in somewhere. At least she could sit beside Reeves.

Freddie cut that short.

"Drive with me, Reeves," he said. "Lady





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Elverton's afraid of my powers. I go too fast to please her."

Reeves came gladly. He liked the foolish little man, who had loved so loyally, and met his sorrows now with such quiet bravery.

"Who's this for?" Sir Henry fussing over half a dozen things at once, now began to agitate himself about another. "Who on earth has hired Davis' dogcart?"

Every one knew the lame old hireling with the forelegs and indifferent wind which was being whipped up to the door.

"It's Mr. Begbie's man, Sir Henry. He leave to go to the races, and so he hired this himself." James volunteered the information distinct disapprobation. He had never asked to go racing. The muffled figure of the new appeared discreetly at the side door. Evelyn vase turned her head—she grew very sure of this heavy-footed servant.

"Don't forget," she said to Freddie, "to post office—there are letters to post." The man jumped at the words, bundling quickly into the dogcart and slipping away back avenue with the hireling urged to a hasty departure. Evelyn leant back with a quick sigh, meant to be at the post office before them—the back avenue was a short way to the

They glided off presently, when Sir F. quite finished remembering things. through a day of soft sunlight, with a blowing lightly, the clouds massing on

gave sullen word that they would come again ere night, but they held away now, leaving the pallid blue clear, save for long trails and flecks of white.

A day of clear lights and easy sight. Reeves's shoulders shivered a little, his teeth came hard on his lower lip as they shot out of the avenue past the thick trees. He had hoped for blustering winds and thick squalls of rain, in which a man could keep his head down and his coat-collar turned up, and so hide his face. To-day was mild as early summer, the sunshine would bring every feature into relief, and at any corner, on any stretch of road, Fitson might pass. The detective might very easily be at the races themselves, combining amusement with his work. He had heard him speak of racehorses.

The drive was a nightmare to the man who sat smoking and talking quietly, sympathising with Freddie's sorrows, chatting of his chances in the race, as if no sword hung hair-suspended above his dark head.

A man stood at the corner staring at them. Involuntarily Reeves stooped suddenly, then raised his head, with a laugh at his own nerves; it was Sir Henry's steward, coming back from the village. As they left Claxton behind—they did not stop at the post office, which had the hired dogcart standing at its door—Reeves grew easier. There was less chance of meeting Fitson now that Monkshill was four miles away to the west, and they were running through a level, heavily wooded country to Gateshill. The racecourse lay in a plateau between a group of wooded hills. They swept round the last

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ep breath of relief. He had changed then, more  
an he dreamt of. A stunted little jockey turned  
ickly, staring at him. "Mighty like Mr. Hamp-  
ire," he muttered, and then luck ordained that  
should see no one else of the people who had  
rown him.

Sir Henry seemed to precipitate himself into a  
owd of friends, to shake their hands, slap them on  
e shoulders, and tell them his horse could not lose,  
ll at once. Next minute, surrounded by them all,  
e was gazing at Goldgirl, Payne's mare, in an  
ttitude of most profound dejection.

She was a big, lengthy mare, built more for speed  
han staying powers, but with a kind, generous eye  
hich told that, lose or win, she would do her best.

"A rare turn of speed—a rare turn," murmured  
racing friend of Sir Henry's to Reeves. "She'll  
ry to cut you all down and make a big enough lead,  
ever to be caught—that's what she did before. A  
bundering good mare—and your horse is a rogue.  
You are riding Hotspur, aren't you?"

Riding him. It seemed to remind Sir Henry that  
e had neglected his rider. Immediately, nothing  
about it, he plunged into an excited description of  
Reeves's proficiency, and promptly introduced him  
o half a dozen people he had met and spoken to  
ut hunting.

"Done wonders in Australia—Melbourne and  
Sydney," prattled Sir Henry eagerly. "Tre-

weighted old fellow in the first mile; on then, inch by inch, yard by yard. Billy never went out for less than three miles. The gap would close, and the leaders know the sickening certainty that old Billy was wearing them down. On the last fence; down the straight—would they tire enough in time? for Billy would go no faster. Neither whip nor spur was needed on a horse who always *did his best*. Weight seemed to make no difference to him. If the National had been only five miles he would probably have won it every time, and, as it was, his bald, pink nose caught the judges' eye many times, until the gallant old life was ended at Nethaven, where Flashlamp, a riderless horse, turned him over at the third fence out, and Billy's back was broken. The old friends were parading before Reeves's memory as he walked into the paddock. Susie, the sulky mare, who would not start, or, if she did, would run away or run out; Greenbat, a mealy, soft-hearted brute; Victor, who could not jump,—those were the failures. Then gallant old Billy; Red Rue, the youngster; Firefly, his first mount. A fresh danger sent Reeves shivering from his reveries. He had not changed much—what if old Tom Knowles, the trainer, if Hilyard Stanton, a dozen of his old racing friends, should see and recognise him? He stopped with a swift jerk, the blood ebbing from his face, for there was Tom himself, in apparently the same black-and-white check suit and flaring red tie, with the large horseshoe pin stuck in it, his fresh pink face absolutely unchanged. But the trainer did not associate the thin man walking

the day was, putting a big silk muffler round his throat. Even if Fitson turned up, he might not look at the gentleman rider.

The numbers were up by this time for the first race, the horses out. The old fever ran high in his blood as the hurdle-racers cantered past. Merryboy, a stuffy, low chestnut caught his eye as he came along; *Buttonmaker*, a light, muddled brown, looked more like striding away for the two miles over the sticks.

These two were most fancied, but Reeves liked best of all a rather small bay mare, Bessy. She had only run once before, he found out, and ran greenly; but her breeding was exceptional, and her owner fancied her for the race "Ten to one, Bessy." Reeves put his sovereign on her, and ran up to join the others in the stand, Freddie Floyd following his example for a fiver.

The two favourites made the running, watching each other jealously. As they came at the last hurdle it was evident that Buttonmaker was the faster horse, but was tiring, and Merryboy was galloping on for all he was worth half a length behind him.

As they got half-way up the straight they were neck and neck. Buttonmaker's jockey called on his horse, the bay's speed told, and he shot out with a clean lead, to die completely away, be overhauled by Merryboy, who passed him, his race apparently won, and he stopped riding.

"Oh, I backed that one," Violet danced upon the stand with a girl's joy in winning.



A roar!—something coming up on the inside like a flash. Bessy, who had been running greenly all through, suddenly put her heart into it. She raced by Merryboy's girths, by his head, strode on amid cheers from the bookmakers, and won by two lengths.

"I thought she looked speedy," said Reeves, when he had finished shouting. "That was a nice win for you, Floyd."

"You don't mean to say you backed that thing?" Violet looked at them with open and undisguised annoyance. "Freddie, you might have told me."

"I didn't think you ever cared to take my tips," he said in the quiet manner which was new to him. "Graves put you on the other."

"Well, you might tell me the next time," she said in injured tones, flying off with Jack Payne, and feeling exceedingly bored with him. Jack was a married man who talked about his wife and children.

The second race was a gift for the favourite, France, a big, raking grey, and they backed it, but Violet, now impressed by the chance of outsiders, picked out a weedy, bay mare, which was last, and was again irritated.

The race of the day, the Gatheshill Hunt Steeplechase, was upon them. There would be heavy wagering on this, for there were several good horses in it.

The horses, with their numbers on them, were each surrounded by groups of supporters.

Payne's mare was made favourite, her long, springy step, her absolute lack of nervousness, and

her perfect condition bringing her hosts of friends. She went to two to one, and was firm at that, Loosefish, a fired black, claiming next attention. He had run a good second to Rockhampton, and was known to be smart. Except by his own partisans, Hotspur was unnoticed. He was sweating freely now, lashing out when people came near him, and evidently nervous and excited. Before Reeves mounted, he petted the horse again, stroking the wet, firm-crested neck. "Do your best, old boy," he said gently. "I won't punish you."

"It means an awful lot to me, Reeves." Sir Henry, coming to the perpendicular, after a futile effort to give a leg up to the trainer, caught his rider's arm. "It's not only the money, but I want to prove Payne and all these fellows wrong. I want them to see I know a horse. I bought him on my own judgment."

"It's nerves, and not temper," said Reeves quietly. "I'm ready now, eh?"

He started as if some one had stung him. A little red-bearded city man, sprucely gloved and hatted, came peering at the horse.

"Hotspur, hey?" he said. "Never won anything, has he? Thank you." But as he passed the low words, "Look out, Duke. There's a man on you," floated to Reeves's ears.

It was Bateson. Reeves stared after him. No one on earth could have recognised the spruce, sandy little man, with the very faintest limp, as he went across the paddock. Jim had mastered the art of disguise.

As Reeves dropped lightly into the saddle, Hotspur plunged and squealed, sending the crowd flying with his heels. He went sulkily down past the stands, wincing and shying at the crowds.

Goldgirl increased her friends as she came stealing up at the low fence, standing away and flying it so easily. Loosefish, too, with his resolute, raking style, was admired again. Reeves turned Hotspur—there was no sympathy between them to-day; the horse went woodenly, jerkily, and as they came at the fence Reeves could feel his horse shut up, until, as they reached the jump, Hotspur flung out his forelegs with a sudden jerk.

He shivered then, as if in active fear, tucking his tail down, waiting for the whip.

Every one was staring. Reeves bent his head down, and could have hit and cursed the horse to hurry him away, but he kept his temper.

"Hotspur, old man" Reeves patted the wet neck. "Come along." He turned the horse gently, took him back for a few lengths, and, still soothing him, trotted him quietly up to the fence. There was a moment's indecision, then the bay flew it and strode away after the others, reaching at his bit; a different horse to the sulky, frightened beast of a minute before.

"Lord! How they've beaten you, old chap," Reeves patted him again as they pulled up to walk to the start. He felt easier himself now that he was away from those staring crowds—the refusal had tried him sorely. Now let the worst happen; the right to ride was his.

"Are you all ready there? Come up on, Loosefish. Turn round you in pink. Steady—there you are."

The white flag dropped to a good start. Chaffinch, a hot puller, shot to the front; Goldgirl lay on the rails, going easily; and after a first rush Reeves found Hotspur going freely and well, with no trace of temper. Goldgirl was not making the running to-day. What a jumper he was; the first fence slid beneath to the long, easy fly—he had stolen half a length from those in front. Goldgirl's honest head was just beside him. She was a rare mover, and a fine jumper too. The rush of the air on his face, the flutter of the silks, the thud of hoofs, the swinging of the horse between his knees, went like wine to Reeves's head. Fear, disgrace, were all forgotten, there were only the cocked ears in front, the great shoulders cutting through the air, the others to watch—and beat. He could do it—he knew he could. Hotspur answered each turn of his wrist, each pressure of his knee. Man and horse were one, and he knew how good a thing he bestrode. The third fence flashed back, with a white strip of rail below him. They bent for the stands now, and on for the water. He could not resist letting the horse go a little as they came at it. As the strain of his bits relaxed, Hotspur swept to the front, and, high above the roar, Reeves thought he heard Sir Henry's bellow of joy: "Well done, Hotspur!"

Men scampered from the stands now to back him for a little; the bay horse had shown none of his

former temper that time. They were out into the country again, and Chaffinch, a beaten horse, dropped back. Julia turned over at a stake and found Loosefish made the running race—a fast horse who jumped too high and lost ground. Cockle and Payne's mare was going strong just beside him. Hotspur made it as easily as when they had started, he seemed intirible. Reeves's eyes were afix. He pulled side a shade and shot by Cockle, drawing to Loosefish's quarters as they jumped the next fence, he came almost level. Julia the loose horse jumped into them then. The best horse was to get ahead. He bent, speaking to his horse, pressing him slightly with his knees.

"Get on, old chap," he said. Hotspur seemed to answer. He shot out past the black and past the mare and a roar came from the distant stands.

At this moment I grieve to relate that Sir Henry put two people with his hat, and one was his wife—but that has nothing to do with the race.

Reeves drew a long breath. Loosefish grew level again, and fell away. They raced at the last fence, and a brown lead, a wide scarlet nostril flashed to his knee—the daughter of Hackler would prove her blood. His knees pressed a little closer; a little laugh of sheer triumph bubbled from his lips. Ay, she might try, but Hotspur had her measure. They were over the last fence—the long green ribbon of the straight lay before them; they could see the packed masses of people, hear the shouted names. For the moment they were kings

of that little world, their struggle the one thing seen and thought of; but the horse was the master.

Kirby, Goldgirl's rider, was one of the best in England. He crouched down, game as a tiger, waiting. It was not time to call for the list in his good mare yet, she would give it all so generously that there might be no more to find. He knew Hotspur's reputation, if he could once squeeze ahead, force Reeves to ride the bay would shut up. He swung his whip twice without touching his mare, half hoping the whistle through the air might upset the rogue, but though Hotspur's ears went back he strode on.

They were coming to the first stand now. The end was very near. Reeves raised his head. He had but to keep Hotspur going and it was over. Good mare as Goldgirl was she was no match for Sir Henry's horse. Now they bent out and shouted—screamed for the favourite! He was cheating them all. Then his heart stood still. Standing out among the sea he saw one face, a man standing at one of the gates staring straight at him and waving his hands—George Fitson. The reins relaxed in his nerveless hands, his knees ceased their pressure. It was over. He would be caught, taken away, and his revolver was, for once, not with him. What if he pulled Hotspur's head round, pretended to fall, and gallop off somehow? A mad thought, but it flashed to him.

And the professional behind him knew that his moment was come. The spurs grazed Goldgirl's side, the whalebone sang, and with every nerve



forward, no space to look at each other. The reek from the horse's nostrils was by that of the mare's, the stands seemed to surge down at them, the roar to grow deafening. High above the din came the two names. Hotspur! Goldgirl! Hotspur! Dead heat! The horse!—no, the bay's head was surely in front, drawing away. The judges' boxes flashed by. Hotspur was in his stride again now, another three lengths would have seen him an easy winner—but had he won or lost?

Reeves raised a white, strained face. Had he flung away the race for a paltry piece of cowardice?

The numbers were being pulled into place. Sir Henry, hatless, breathless, was dashing along to meet him as he rode in

"8 . . . 5 . . ."

He looked no more. He had won. A surging joy carried him high on its crest. With the whimsical smile on his face he was prepared to give his hands to the rings of steel. Fitson might not betray him; for another qualm struck Reeves—as a released felon he was not qualified to ride.

He was weighed in, came out again into the cool, clear day to be carried off for champagne and praise—and still no arrest, no tap on the shoulder, no end of the world for him.

Freddie was prancing about with a roll of notes in his hand. He had rushed to put more money on when Reeves passed the stand the first time round, and, not reaching his own man, put it on ready money.





## CHAPTER XIII

### A SOUTHERLY WIND AND A CLOUDY SKY

THE cloud battalions had massed over the clear sky, marched upwards in black array, to grow faint-hearted as they conquered, and, showering light rains upon the world, they faded mistily so that Reeves's last day at Claxton dawned softly grey, with a low wind whimpering through the trees. There would be showers, perhaps, but only of warm rain, and the ground would ride light.

The nerves of mankind are curious things; in the swift reaction from yesterday's excitement his fears had vanished. He would slip away into the unknown, and leave no knowledge to these kind friends—a meteor flashing across their sky, never to be seen again. Anything except the certain suspicion of the revelation of what he had been, and yet had forced himself among them. The hard little case lay in his pocket. He did not look to-day at the ripple of green temptation.

The horses went to Tattersall's on the following Saturday, and he had directed their price should be sent to Jim, his evil little friend. He himse

would have about fifty pounds to face the world with. It would take him to Australia, where he could find hard work and forget . . . his head dropped suddenly . . . would he ever forget? A fair, cold face rose before him, and the ache came back to his heart. Alone for ever—alone, with the memory of scorn and suspicion where he should have found sympathy and love. The scent of may blossoms seemed to drive to his nostrils; if anything could make him wrench that great jewel out and take enough money to start for himself instead of working for others, it would be Evelyn Gervaise's eyes.

He flung the window wide. The cool, moist air washed away depression; the joyousness of waking returned. He looked out across the green park over the rolling wooded country. Men were busy in the stables—his windows looked that way—and he could hear the clunk of buckets and the trample of hoofs. Gardeners trundled barrows down the walk near him, they were altering some flower-beds. It was home, a quiet English home, and the wanderer's heart longed for it. He had braved exposure to stay there, but the memory of his few happy days would comfort him through the long toil to be.

He thought himself safe now; the little revolver was not looked at so often, the dread of the tense moment when his own crooked finger must send him into eternity had grown dim. Life was quick in him. He would have faced it rather than go again to prison; but he did not want to die. His

heart might be dead, might ache for ever, but, alive, he had the right to the warmth of the sun and the whip of the cool winds.

Sir Henry, who was still too excited to stay still for a moment, was tramping up and down—going over the wondrous event of his win. Who said now the horse was sulky? He only wanted a man who understood him. He should be entered for next year's National. He would win. Reeves should ride. Sir Henry in imagination saw the parade at Aintree, his horse *fleeing* over the huge thorn fences . . . depicted the finish, with a bay horse finishing alone.

Out-stay, out-jump. The crowd declaimed his horse's name! The horses round the canal turned Home! He wove plates and cups into what he meant for a model of the Aintree course, put a teapot for Valentine's brook, and promptly upset it as he brought his dream horse across.

"To win a National! James, wipe up the brook, will you? Lord! I'd thought of it all my life. Tell you what, Reeves, if you take a place anywhere I'll send you my horses to train. Pay you well. I've a dozen now."

What a chance! Reeves's thin face grew bright, then darkened again, as he saw Evelyn's eyes fixed on him. As things were, it could not be. Sir Henry would not care to give his horses to Hampshire, the ex-convict—the convicted spoiler of his friend. "I wish I could do it," he said wistfully.

Evelyn was not hunting to-day. Begbie had not come home, and she must wait for him and h



"Conspiracy to drive a man to sin." She stared at him, not understanding. "Look at me straight in the face—as you used to once—and say I stole those things."

His voice was low but clear, and insistent in its utter scorn. She raised her grey eyes slowly and met his. The look in them would haunt her to her death. Reproach, bitterness, but surely no dishonesty. He was so young, despite his grey-locked hair. The pendulum swung back, the oak walls faded, and instead she saw tender green buds, the white of fruit flowers, smelt the sweetness of early summer. Something cleared from her heart, but, pain choking her, she could not speak, and the man standing looking into her eyes believed she scorned him still.

"Then good-bye!" he said, turning away. "Walk on your gold-begemmed path, Evelyn, but, to your sorrow, you'll think sometimes of other feet which struggle alone, ill-shod, across the flints. From to-morrow, and for ever after, memory will trouble you, if your heart is not altogether a hard jewel itself."

For to-morrow he meant that she should know the truth, and believe it or not, as she chose. She shuddering, thought otherwise.

The others called for him. He ran out to the car. Freddie started, and Claxton fell behind. Turning, as they passed the swing gate, he saw a figure on the steps, and thought it waved to them to stop. He would not look again. His brief spell of home was over; he must set his face ahead.

There was no haunting fear upon him to-day. Safety seemed assured. Fitson, if he passed, would merely see a blur of muffled-up sportsmen. He would slip away to-night, and leave no jarring memory to his new friends. For that had been his greatest dread—to stand revealed, when, for the first time for years, he had been again with people as those he had passed his youth with; to see them start away and condemn him—for were not the fruits of his thievery in his pocket? Wrapped up now, lest he should fall out hunting, and someone find them. He could not bear to think of bluff Sir Henry shrinking away, of Freddie Floyer looking at him with hurt, bewildered eyes. No fortune had favoured him. He would escape, and they would never know. Ernest Reeves, the madman who had come alone to Barham, would be talked of for a space and then forgotten.

It was a big meet. The little grey was there for him to ride, walking sedately, her eyes upon the hounds. He swung into the saddle, and took up the reins, feeling her bend her lean neck to the light strain on the bits—tired, blemished, unsound, but a pearl among hunters. If they ran to-day—and something told him they would—he knew no man would be better carried. How he longed to ride her down in his own country, across the fly fences and over the miles of grass, with no sticky plough to struggle through.

As they jogged to the first covert, a spinney about a mile from the meet, tongues wagged still of jewels and burglaries.

"Mad, you know—Elverton's mad," cried someone, "to leave so grave a case in Jones's hands. You should have half London down here, with that stone trembling in the balance. For all you know, one of your servants, some man about the place, may be a well-known thief."

"The emeralds will be found," Sir Henry flushed, and looked uneasy. "I—have a theory about them."

Reeves, riding beside him, looked up sharply. Sir Henry's face was guilty and troubled. Who could the kindly, careless man suspect?

They passed from that to Hotspur—to his marvellous performance and change of temper. Sir Henry had outwitted them all when he bought this horse. No horse could have run a more generous race, or thrown in a finer effort, after his momentary pause, at the finish.

"Something startled him," said the master, turning round. "I was out on the course. Reeves and he seemed to start together—I think at the little man at the gate. He was sticking his head out and darting from side to side."

"You're right. Something did startle us," said Reeves dryly. "You've a quick eye, Henniskeet."

Jack Payne came up to them. Goldgirl was smart, but she had been squarely beaten. He came to ask Reeves to ride for him at Manchester. Goldgirl was running there. What a happy life if he was what he seemed and could have stayed amongst them. But the mouth of the prison wicket yawned black and grim; the shadow of the cold walls fell upon his path.



There was no hunting fear upon him to-day. Safety seemed assured. Fitson, if he passed, would merely see a blur of muffled-up sportsmen. He would slip away to-night, and leave no jarring memory to his new friends. For that had been his greatest dread—to stand revealed, when, for the first time for years, he had been again with people as those he had passed his youth with; to see them start away and condemn him—for were not the fruits of his thievery in his pocket? Wrapped up now lest he should fall out hunting, and some one find them. He could not bear to think of bluff Sir Henry shrinking away of Freddie Floyd looking at him with hurt bewildered eyes. No, fortune had favoured him. He would escape, and they would never know. Ernest Reeves, the madman who had come alone to Barham, would be talked of for a space and then forgotten.

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jewels. He was, no doubt, travelling down with them himself, failing even to trust the detective. She was pale and worn-looking, the proud calmness of her beauty overshadowed by a restless uneasiness.

The motor was at the door when she met him in the hall; the others were fussing into coats, picking up packets of sandwiches, hunting for whips—nothing is ever quite right on a hunting morning.

"Good-bye!" he said quietly to her.

"Good-bye!" she started, and, despite herself, her lips quivered. "You are not coming back?"

"My things are packed. I have bidden my kind hostess adieu. I am going, Evie, out of your life for ever. Good diamonds to you"

"You are so sure, then, of getting away? What of Fitson?"

Reeves laughed.

"He is not following me—I found that out yesterday. He is hot upon some other trail, and I think I know whose it is. But all the hounds in Scotland Yard will not catch that little hare. I shall get away to-night, and if you keep our secret no one will know who I was."

"But—the emeralds?" she jerked out, almost piteously.

"The emeralds which I have stolen? I had forgotten those." His face grew very stern.

"Evelyn Gervaise, when souls are called to judgment, there will be one heavy indictment against yours."

"What do you mean?" she muttered.

"Mad, you know—Elvaston's mad," cried someone, "to leave so grave a case in Jones's hands. You should have held London down here, with that stone trembling in the balance. For all you know, one of your servants, some man about the place, may be a well known thief."

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"Something startled him," said the master, turning round. "I was out on the course. Reeves and he seemed to start together. I think at the little man at the gate. He was striking his head out and darting from side to side."

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"You're right. Something did startle us," said Reeves dryly. "You've a quick eye, Henneskeet."

Jack Payne came up to them. Goldgul was smart, but she had been squarely beaten. He came to ask Reeves to ride for him at Manchester. Goldgul was running there. What a happy life if he was what he seemed and could have stayed amongst them. But the mouth of the prison wicket yawned. The shadow of the cold walls fell



He thanked Payne lightly—said he would let him know.

"My sister is ill in Australia—I may have to sail at once," he said, lying glibly, that he might leave some good excuse behind him.

"Muegrave, too, wants you to ride Loosefish for him. Now that you've shown us what you can do, you'd have no end of mounts," said Payne. "It wasn't your first day between the flags, old chap. Some one said—Dickson's trainer, I think—that your seat reminded him of Hampshire, a poor young chap who went under years ago, and a wonder to ride, he said."

"A young fellow who went under years ago." They sung his requiem thus, and he stood, quick to hear it echo above the coffin of what he had been.

"We'll have a hunt to-day," said Freddie. "This place is a certain find, with our very best bit of country in front. We often slip through a pasture valley here, leaving the plough on either side."

The spinney was a sheltered one, with a tangle of undergrowth giving good cover for a fox. Hounds clashed in, and were scarcely across the low hedge when a long-drawn note proclaimed there was something there. Old Sandow rang it out; Music and Merriman, dashing to the sound, confirmed it. It was taken up until the wood rang to a sheer clash of melody. Horses stood shivering, with cocked ears and open, snuffing nostrils. They loved a hunt as dearly as their masters, and this burst of music maddened them. Men shoved their hats down and took up their reins.

The ever-present band of the unwilling was loudest in uneasy joy. "Hope to Heaven he won't get in, as he did last time, or run back to Monkshill; that would be a sell." While all the time their longing eyes were fixed upon that line, for there were a long lane and lines of gates leading all the way to the woodlands. The line to Cheriton, a six-mile point, lay over holding grass fields, fenced by wide banks and straggling hedges, with the Grover, a formidable brook winding in and out like a silver snake. A man must sit down and ride if he meant to see hounds run across the Cheriton Vale. It carried a scent at all times, and they would be running up-wind all day.

A moment's silence. "Got to ground again—disgraceful!" growled Munday Payne, who hated a fence as his natural enemy.

There had been no neglect in stopping this time, but their fox, an old customer, finding the place too hot to hold him, had doubled sharply back where the undergrowth was thickest, and, having gained a slight advantage, had slipped away under the second whop's nose, his grey-flecked mask set straight for Cheriton Woods.

"Go—on—away!" Goodstall's shrill young voice rang the great news out lustily.

Sharp toot on the horn; the master fleeting round the cover and crashing through a thick hedge at the end of it, an awkward, straggling fence with a ditch at the taking-off side. But the gate was half a field away. See them drive out of the crowd, the thrusters who know no fear, and love



## A Southerly Wind and a Cloudy Sky 243

Down on to spongy, holding pasture, where scent was not quite so good. But there was no resemblance of a check. How they drove on! Now old Sandow had the lead, now Melody, now Bustler. Here, when their fox had turned, the leaders over-ran it, and the side hounds drove in, making it good in a second. They threw their tongues again and again, as they swung along the bank and out into a higher field

"The best scenting-day we've had." The master, on a wiry black, came up beside Reeves. "Rare good mare of yours," he added.

"More than good" Reeves patted the damp grey neck. He was happy as he had not been for years. All troubles were forgotten; there was nothing on earth but the game little mare beneath him, as she strode on with her easy, elastic stride, the pied wave of the straining pack on his left, the soft wind cool on his face, the joy of the big fences flung behind, with never a falter or mistake. Over went a raking chestnut at an ugly hedge and ditch; his grey dropped over light as a feather, well clear of the ditch. Some one else down at a bank; a roaring horse was visibly distressed beside him; the mare went as easily as if at exercise.

There are joys in this life of ours, but perhaps the clean joy of a hunt overshadows them all. It is born on a grey winter's morning to die on a cool winter's evening, and to be born again and again so long as there is youth in us to go forth, nerve enough to love it with no qualms of fear, and money enough to buy the generous screw which loves it



gallop? They swept on through moist, spongy land, churning it to the horses' fetlocks, causing flanks to heave and wide nostrils to dilate. Then they left the soft piece behind, for fortunately there was a slope of hard ground between the soft and the stream. A splash of silver as the hounds dashed in, their dripping bodies showing as they clambered out, and flung themselves again upon the line. Then the master's horse, quickening his stride, rising with an easy, long bound and leaving the streak of water behind. Could the grey mare jump water? She cocked her ears, shortened her strides, and the question was answered—the stream was a fence well finished with

Splash! Splash! Two horses, jumping short, two dripping men clambering to land, cooled the ardour of many who were irresolute before. Bridles were tightened, heads turned, some one asked for a bridge, and but twelve of the field—two of them at least a stone heavier than when they had started—got over the stream. The first bridge was a mile away, and with a closely fenced country to be crossed. The shirkers saw no more of the hunt. Violet's cob had got over with a scramble. Freddie's thoroughbred had slipped on, taking off, and he was one of the wet ones, but he galloped on, with, for the time, all his sorrows forgotten, his muddy face alight with joy.

A turn to the right after they had crossed the stream, a field or two of plough to steady the pace, and they ran into a plantation of Scotch fir, planted thinly. "Wire!" A voice called the warning.



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*The fence outside the plantation—a low bank and rail—was topped by three thick strands of wire. Nippers were out in a second; but as the whips sprang down, and the first strand parted with a ping of remonstrance, the men saw the fence was now unjumpable, for on the far side the owner, a growling, ill-tempered young farmer, had run up a stout wooden paling. The wood straggled for nearly a mile—hounds were streaking up the next field. By the time they had galloped their horses round, the pack would be out of sight. In one corner the ditch was covered by a wooden stile, high and stiff and firmly made—an ugly jump to come at straight, but here out of a corner, with no space to take off, and but little to land, almost impossible. Reeves took his Irish mare by the head, and, as he did so, Freddie Floyd's brown chested the top rail and fell helplessly. He could not jump there now, but he spied a spot on the far side of the ditch where there was a gap in the rails. He had heard of the cleverness of Irish horses; what if he jumped her off the bank where they had cut the wire into the ditch, and then up the far side? The grey mare snuffed at the deep drop, seemed to know by instinct what was wanted; in a second they were floundering on the damp but firm bottom of the ditch, and in another, with an almost perpendicular bound, a convulsive struggle and twist of her active quarters, they were through the gap in the rails and away alone behind the vanishing pack.*

Men were hammering at the stout timber; he

had slipped out unnoticed, and he heard a shout as they saw him. He patted the grey mare's neck, he laughed aloud for the sheer joy of living, for the strong life between his knees, the wind upon his face, the pack driving so steadily ahead. His thirty-pound screw had beaten everything. Over a low hedge, on and off a broad bank, fields growing lighter as they ran up the slope leading to Cheriton Woods, dark against the grey sky

Freddie, who had picked himself up, was a short distance behind; the rest of the field had knocked the stile down and were coming on, some way back.

The grey mare, striding along easily, cocked her ears, as a bloodthirsty burst of music came from the pack—they had viewed their fox. "Yow-oo-oo," till the world echoed to it. Straining each limb now, tense faces set for blood. Blood they would have. A sound to drive men mad, to set tired horses striding as if the long gallop had never been; but what to the tired fox struggling ahead? Turning blindly down a hedgerow, stretching out again with one last hopeless effort, stealing half a field to lose it again—but gallant to the last, trying to reach Cheriton. Hot breaths close on him—a last turn; bared teeth snapping in impotent bravery gashing Melody's shoulder—and then the end was swift.

Over it, as the whips dashed up, rang the merry death-cry of the hunt. One had suffered to make many happy.

Reeves stood by the grey mare; she was blown, but not distressed; there was blood in her veins



It looked as if some angry, shy children had pulled with strong fingers, rending the vapours into strange tortured shapes—rags and wisps of green and indigo and white, with a sulky gleam of light behind them, where the sun was hidden.

Violet yawned; an afternoon, with no fixed employment, stretched emptily before her. Reeves was not coming back; Freddie—the new Freddie—whose attitude filled her with puzzled resentment, would read a book or play bridge instead of hanging on her words. Oh, Claxton was too dull, and she was really going to upset her people by a week-end at a house she knew she ought not to stay at; in the meantime, her naughty little brain had thought of something to do.

"Mr. Reeves"—she rode up to him, speaking in low tones—"you've promised me tea. Bake the damper this afternoon, and I will come to eat it."

"I"—he looked startled, the fever of the gallop was growing cold, and he remembered he had many things to do—"I'm afraid, Butterfly, I should have no flowerdew ready. Better eat hot scones at Claxton. Besides, I am alone."

Her face set mutinously.

"Heat the ashes—bake the damper," she said. "I may come." She pulled back then to talk to some one else, and he hardly knew whether she meant to come, or was joking.

A great sadness crept upon him. He was seeing his last of these kindly, careless people—would never ride with them, never speak to them again. Now all he asked was to slip from their lives—a

mere stranger who had pleased them—and leave no jarring note behind.

Hampshire—the convict. There was actual pain at the thought of their hurt, astonished faces. He asked few things of life, but he asked this now, humbly and earnestly—one boon from the Unseen Powers, one mercy in a tragic life—to let him vanish, and appear no treacherous thief to them. With some touch of a child's faith he formed his prayer, and believed it would be answered.

The long walls of Barham rose grey and cold before them; neglected trees stretched their branches over it; great cracks and fissures, all unmended, showing in the stone-work. The iron gates lolled open; the lodge was empty, and there was no one to keep them shut.

Far up the avenue one could catch a glimpse of the house. A big homelike place, if any one had kept it up. A thin grey spiral of smoke trailed from one chimney—faithful Mrs. Hodge, not forgetting him, had made a fire. He thought with some impatience of the warm dining-room at Claxton, and then with a shrug of distaste at what his own meal would be—an egg, a slice of bacon, the hot smell of cooking in the big gloomy room. He had grown fastidious at Claxton.

"We part here"—despite himself his voice rang drearily. "No, it's very good of you, Elverton, but I must get back. I've so much to do."

"Servants coming and so on?" said Sir Henry genially.

"If they come at all now. I greatly fear I may

have to get away at once—to my sister. We—" if only his voice would not shake—" we may never meet again, and you don't know how I thank you."

"For a night or two's lodging—nonsense, man."

"For far more than that. For kindness to a lonely stranger."

"Look at all you've done for us. Come back, old boy, if only to ride Hotspur again."

"I came in for troublous times, too," Reeves went on. "But, I hope the emeralds will be found."

"Oh, they will—they will" The same look of uneasiness crossed Sir Henry's bluff face. Again Reeves wondered what maggot of suspicion burrowed in the simple squire's brain.

"If, then, as I fear, I may have news, I'll say good-bye." He stood by the big weight-carrier, and Sir Henry's strong hand closed on the delicate one held out to him, and crushed it till Reeves smiled and winced.

"If I could." The man's voice came with almost a moan. "If I could, Floyd Will you take the mare now. I'll run up. If I want her next week I'll ask you for a ride."

Of course, Freddie reached for the bridle, remonstrated, argued feebly, and finally took the reins. The grey mare hung back a little, knowing her stable. Then, with a last chorus of good-byes, they all clattered round the bend in the road.

It was over. He drew a long breath. He had braved the dangers and escaped. He would not see them again, but they would never know him

For what he was. Sir Henry would keep his memory green as the fellow who rode Hotspur. Violet would talk petulantly of the peculiar millionaire. Fredie would honour him as a good man to bonds. Evelyn? the day seemed to grow suddenly cold, and he turned in.

He had so many things to do before he slipped away unobserved. The smile on his lips was a sad thing, for it was born of that one thought that he was leaving a clean memory to these new friends.

As he walked up the grass-streaked avenue, between the high tangle of overgrown laurels, a figure, silent and stealthy, slipped from tree to tree, keeping him in sight, watched Reeves go up the wide stone steps and let himself into the silent house, and then, with a snarl of discontent, cuddled into the doubtful comfort of a space between two belts of shrubs and sat there waiting. So does Providence answer a humble prayer.

## CHAPTER XIV

### VIOLET GOES OUT TO TEA

WHEN the motor had gone away from Claxton, and Evelyn Gervaise was left alone, she could not rest or read, or settle to do anything. Lady Elverton breakfasted upstairs, lamenting her lost jewels—discussing her sorrows with her tearful maid.

"Why would not Sir Henry send for some one really good? Why did he trust to Jones, who measured all the footsteps outside the billiard-room and found they fitted his own boot? What does Sir Henry think?" shot out m'lady, in staccato tones, sitting up in bed with a sudden access of energy. "He won't look at it seriously."

Marvin hung her head, and let innocence paint a wave of red upon her sallow cheeks. Surely it could not be her?

"It's the one in the house, m'lady," she said tremulously. "One can see that."

"I can't see anything in Sir Henry," declaimed m'lady impatiently. "Only this time he won't."

"I'm sick for my part," said Marvin. "I'm sick for my part, and Susie Elverton, who was over forty, and a child. She was honestly broken down."





room. If Ernest had never been a thief, and she, in her intolerance, her cloak of trite righteousness, had helped to doom him?

What a merry, dare-devil boy he had been then; the thought of taking the necklace for her to wear would have been a mischievous delight to him. But he had stolen, not for her, but to pay his debts, she told herself angrily, scorning the new self in her which dared to doubt the proven facts, and would have listened to romance—stolen then, and had come among them now to steal again, to take the emeralds. "Rest assured," he had said in that cold, tired voice, "Lady Elverton shall suffer no loss from me." He would send them back then, before he got away—if he got away. Footsteps made her heart beat wildly. It was only James coming with coal for the fire, but she was afraid of everything. Why had he not done as she had begged him—left two days before? She was afraid of Harold Begbie. She dreaded the cold suspicion in his eyes.

Back again to the hall. How the morning dragged—the hours seemed leaden-footed. If this day were only over, she might breathe more freely.

Wheels crunching on the gravel. A hired fly drew up at the house, and from it descended Harold Begbie, in his hard, thick overcoat, and with him a dapper, smug little man who carried a black case in his arms. A policeman wearing a worried expression rode on the front seat. Up went her heart again, choking her. Oh, the man was only



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Back again to the hall. How the minutes dragged—the hours seemed ~~like~~ *like* ~~hours~~ *hours*. In the day were only over, she ~~could~~ *could* ~~not~~ *not* freely.

Wheels drew  
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Mr Grant.  
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gems. Few women had such flawless skins, such lustrous golden hair; jewels seemed to gather light and fire against either.

"Or one might have a great flower," he went on, "for your veil. Turquoises would show well. Put the box down, Mr. Grant," he said to the dapper little man he had brought with him; "I think we shall have time now."

"It will be difficult," she said, her voice sounding hollow. What had he talked to Granby about, who was unsuspecting, taking things quietly? She worked herself into a fever of unrest.

"You mean a difficult choice!" Harold Begbie, with the deliberation of movement which had often worried her before, unstrapped a small flat case, taking out some books of designs. "We shall see the effect of the real stones to-day," he said, gloating over his treasures. "Carefully now, Mr. Grant; we shall undo the stones in the boudoir; yes, that will do. You will be careful not to leave them for a moment unless I take over the charge. Yes; precisely."

A clatter of hoofs, a rattle of voices; Begbie looked up with a start of ill-humour.

"They are back from hunting," he said irritably; "they will want luncheon at once. How very annoying. Better put it off now until—say, three o'clock, Evelyn. In the little boudoir, Mr. Grant. Will you kindly take the case to my room for the present? I will sit with it there while you take refreshment."

With a rush of fresh air the fox-hunters came





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there to guard the jewels. Begbie left nothing to chance.

But her face was moist and whiter than before as she greeted her fiancé, meekly accepting the peck upon her cheek which he honoured her with.

"All hunting except you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And Reeves?"

"He is hunting too. Her lips were dry, she could scarcely speak.

The heavy loaded valet came to meet his master. She could hear their voices speaking earnestly.

"Not coming back here?" Begbie looked perturbed. "We have run a great risk, Granby. Not at all alarmed you say? Taking things quietly? Oh, perhaps so, but I shall wire Evelyn"—his hands hovered with a certain tenderness over the black brass-clamped case—"the stones are here, and I have got the designs. Is there time, do you think, before luncheon to thoroughly decide on your wedding jewels? You will be a very lucky woman, Evelyn, on that day. For the moment he forgot everything in his passion for his glittering toys. "The blue diamond, Evelyn; the black pearls; then this string and ornament, which we must think out to show against your white gown. I think a great butterfly might catch your veil—stars and half-moons are hackneyed; but a butterfly, say, of sapphires, against your fair hair—sapphires, with legs of finest diamonds." He eyed her proudly, but dispassionately. She was at the moment nothing personal, but a human background to his beloved

gems. Few women had such flawless skins, such lustrous golden hair; jewels seemed to gather light and fire against either.

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With a . . . . .

trooping in. They were full of the hunt—what a gallop it had been; how they had crossed the river—Violet had jumped it; how the honours of the day lay with Reeves—they told how he had led almost throughout; how he had pounded them all out of the wood, and then been alone with the hounds until, three fields from Cheriton, they killed.

Such a mare—such a man to ride; slipping actually into the ditch and out where there was a gap in the railings. Nothing but an Irish horse could have done it. Freddie had bought the mare. Mr. Reeves was going away at once—his sister was ill. All this, and more, Violet prattled out, with a *bass chorus from Sir Henry*, and Evelyn listened with strange thrills which were half pain, and bitterly close to pride. How he could ride, her one-time lover—fearlessly and so quietly. Now he was going away, and would trouble her no more, and that, too, was half pain and half a great relief.

"He's so peculiar, Evie," said Violet, perching on a chair-arm and swinging her well-booted feet. "You know, I believe he's a millionaire—one of these great big Australian people come down to make his own friends, and see what it's like when one isn't feted for one's money." Decision was firm in Violet's heart—she meant to be at Barham to tea. Before she went to change, she slipped a bicycle from its stand, with a shudder of distaste, for she disliked bicycling, and put it outside the conservatory door. It was an easy place to get away from, with a shadowy path which hid one almost immediately from any watchers in the windows.

Violet loved mysteries. After a second thought she wheeled the bicycle farther away, leaving it in the shadow of the trees, and then ran to change.

Freddie and Sir Henry had already dumped off; Evelyn was alone again. The clock seemed to drag to-day. If only she were sure that Reeves had really gone. She heard Begbie's harsh voice upstairs, speaking to Freddie, but could not hear what they said; as Freddie went on, Begbie came downstairs. He went to the bureau in the hall, and took up the telegraph-forms; then rang the bell.

"Send this, James, please; sixpence—precisely." He counted out four pennies and put two stamps, extracted slowly from a pocket-book, with them. Who was the wire to? Evelyn longed to know. Each trivial incident to-day seemed a mountain of fate to her.

"Wiring about anything important, Harold?" she said, trying to speak carelessly.

He turned to look at her with a curious, dry smile.

"Yes," he answered; "yes, my dear. That will do, James," and he went upstairs again quickly. The jewel-case was unguarded in his room.

Should she follow James and ask? What would the man think? Evelyn jumped up, and then shook her head impatiently. Why should she imagine things? It was only some wire about a sale or purchase.

James reappeared at the door.

"Beg pardon, miss, there's a word I can't make



out. *Man safe or man safe*—Mr. Begbie do write crabbled, miss."

She picked up the lined white form. It was "*safe*," undoubtedly

' *Man safe* Will meet 5.40 — BEGBIE."

"It is *safe*," James' she said, her voice faltering.

"Thank you, miss." James went off contented.

What did it mean? Who was *safe*? Why should Begbie meet the five-forty? Had it anything to do with Mr. Grant, now lunching hurriedly on cold beef and pickles? If it applied to Reeves, why mention the five-forty? No, it could not have anything to do with him. Puzzling her brains, she went to her room to put on some of the jewels her fiancé liked to see her use, to load her slim fingers with heavy rings, and then go down to luncheon.

Every one seemed so hungry as she played with her food. The steam of hot cutlets and smoking potatoes made her feel ill. It was an interminable meal to her—relays of sweets, savouries, cake, coffee; it was something when cigarettes were lighted, and the blue haze drifted across the flower-decked table.

Something seemed to have given way in her brain. She had, from too much thought, lost the power to think coherently. Voices irritated her, but she scarcely knew what they said. Begbie's hard tones seemed to be louder than the others', as he broke across rhapsodies of hound and horse with his constant prate of his jewels.

Sir Henry blazed out about the brook. How the old horse had actually cleared it—who said the Mite was underbred now? The thin voice drowned the big one.

Did they know what a burglar would find to-day, if he broke in? All his best stones waiting for Evelyn to choose from, to settle on her wedding jewels; and time pressed.

"Fancy diving in among rubies and diamonds, as if you were going to string beads," said Violet flippantly. "Let one fall on the floor for me, Evie."

"Do you approve, Miss St. Maur, of a string of coloured diamonds and black pearls? My own idea," asked Begbie.

"Barbaric," she answered. "Why not make a great frame, Mr. Begbie, all jewels, and just let Evie walk under it up the aisle—a shadow in white, just to show she's there?" said naughty Violet. "The bride under a canopy of gems. You couldn't beat that, you know."

"Miss St. Maur is pleased to be amusing," snarled Begbie.

Evelyn could hear them wrangling, with a vague impatience, but no real sense of what they were saying.

"Oh, how the cob went to-day." Violet's face was alight now. The memory of the gallop drowned a brief pang of envy for the jewels. "Freddie, I'll take a mount on the grey mare, now it's yours."

"Whenever you like," he said quietly—"that is when I am here again. I leave next week—on Monday, I fear."



the truly feminine idea that making herself a little uncomfortable must be direct revenge upon a man, she walked to the window, pressing her pretty nose against the glass.

How dreary the evening had grown—the low clouds massed in inky smudges, with frayed edges of brown and grey. A cold wind tore whooping through the trees, and already a brisk patter of rain was falling. It was a most unpleasing afternoon.

But the long afternoon stretched interminably. She might, of course, help Evelyn to choose designs, and grow sick with envy over the glitter of the jewels. The idea of tea at Barham, with the distant propriety of the scrubber in the kitchen, allured her.

She wanted to see Reeves again. It would be fun to take tea with him alone in one of the big, badly furnished rooms—to rate a man's clumsiness as he buttered bread and poured out tea. Violet's imagination was lively enough to conjure up little scenes, with herself as the central figure of the piece. The dainty, pretty girl helping over the teacups—his last memory of England. How he would thank her for coming, and if he really were a millionaire, and said anything, then Freddie . . . but here her lip drooped again, and it was two minutes before she rushed off to the conservatory to ruthlessly despoil some lily-of-the-valley and fasten a big fragrant bunch into her blouse. "He said he loved it," laughed Miss Violet, all dimples and mischief again. The ride through the wind might be tiring, but any other way of going would betray her, and the idea of her tea-party grew upon her. How shocked and angry Freddie would

"Mr. Begbie, miss, is waiting downstairs. He would like you to come at once."

"I am coming." But she did not stir. The letters were not burnt yet.

Slowly one was dropped into the fire; it caught, flared, turned to black cinder, with love words standing bleakly plain. No, she could not bear that. With another sob, she ran to the old box and pushed the letters in beside a little topaz necklace, and a faded, worthless, turquoise ring.

"Evelyn!" An irate knock at her door. "I have waited for an hour, and I have business later on. Will you come at once?"

It was Harold Begbie, somewhat ludicrously out of breath, with the box of jewels tucked under one careful arm.

"I—am sorry, I forgot the time."

"Unpunctuality is detestable. Kindly come at once; this will take time." He turned, going away deliberately, as he did all things, with the box carried in both hands now.

Evelyn smoothed her mass of fair hair, she glanced at the glittering stones upon her fingers, and slowly followed him; but she took the turquoise ring out and slipped it into her pocket. At the foot of the stairs he was stopped by James, exceedingly excited.

Mr. Jones was in the library with Sir Henry. Would Mr. Begbie go in at once?—they had a clue.

Begbie smiled indulgently. He laid the case upon the table, snicking back the spring lock. Susie Elverton, declaiming indignantly that she had given

every particular and did not believe the things would ever be found, went sitting across the dim old hall. A huge log fire spluttered and crackled, flinging flashes of light on glittering armour, reflected in the polished oaken floor. Home, harmonious and lovable ; and Ernest Reeves was away in the dreary, half-furnished Barham rooms, getting ready for flight.

Evelyn bent over the case—they were trays of glittering precious things—lifting cunningly one from another. Here, in a little inner case, were the coloured diamonds (the well-known historic pink gem which carried the weight of murders and thefts and dishonour on its rosy, flashing breast), the three yellow gems, another blue, the Queen of France's sapphire (two men had been beheaded for that, and others had schemed and murdered for its placid blue beauty). Evelyn lifted them softly. Was not Begbie rash to bring them all down like that ? True, Grant sat drearily in the hall outside.

A brisk rustle of skirts and clatter of high heels ; and Violet, very winsome, in a deep blue dress, came rushing in.

" Oh, Evie, it's my cap. Shall I wear this scarlet velvet one, or this to match the dress ? "

The little coquette perched the scarlet cap on her fluffy curls, turning and preening—then put on the soberer blue.

" The blue, without doubt," said Evelyn gravely.

" Oh, I knew it was, myself, but I love the other."

Violet flung the red tam-o'-shanter, wrapped in a



briskly. "You are the wax figure. Mr. Begbie's wife and diamonds stop the way. Even royalty will be outshone. You lucky girl. What a lot that thing in your hands has on its conscience. Some one murdered the Comtesse de la Place for that, didn't they?"

"Two men—they were guillotined. And Maxime de Paille shot himself because he was ruined for its price. And Lulu Vallie took poison when she found she must sell it. They are not holy things, these historical stones."

"What's holy—that's worth money?" said Violet, laughing. "Now choose well. But don't have black pearls and coloured diamonds like a nigger set in jam. Bye, bye. I'm off."

"Where to?" Evelyn asked.

"For a little spin on a bicycle. Nice weather," she pointed, shuddering, at the rainy evening, then ran off through the conservatory.

"To see Ernest, perhaps." Evelyn laid the sapphire down. "She is capable of anything in her mischievous way."

Violet stood at the conservatory door. Something in Evelyn's face touched her.

"I wouldn't care to kiss a jewel-peg," she murmured, dimpling, and ran back again. "Oh, cheer up; think of next season," she cried, kissing Evelyn affectionately.

"Poor little, kind feather-brain!" Evelyn bent over her case, with tears in her eyes. "She means well. A question for the gods—Is it better to be born with a heart which has never known softness,





## CHAPTER XV

### A DIFFICULT CHOICE

BEGGIE pulled out his watch. He glanced at the stones, and turned on the electric lights. The soft radiance flooded the little room, falling on the precious things nestling on their velvet beds.

"I have so little time," said Begbie querulously. "My hour has been swept away by your delay and this foolish call from our local Sherlock Holmes. I went to hear him prate in his folly. Ah, I see you have already selected that pendant design. It will be admirable for the big sapphire. There are other wonderful things here, you know, Evelyn. The Stuart beryls—they want resetting; the Lenisby rubies. But I can rely upon your taste; and I must leave you soon. Grant will stay at the door all the time, so you need not feel uneasy." He bolted the door of the conservatory as he spoke.

"Yes." She watched him listlessly.

The shaded lights made the room look cosy and bright, but no one had drawn the curtains, and the dun, torn night mouthed faint and wan at the window, the pale radiance of a crescent moon



against some unset diamonds, watching how the cold fire and sparkle threw up the quiet blue.

"Muttering," said Begbie coldly, "is a bad habit, Evelyn."

"Tell me"—she swung upon him suddenly, the blue and white stones in her hands—"tell me, Harold, what are all these things worth?"

"Worth?" A pleased smile creased his hard face. "That would indeed be hard to say, Evelyn. You realise, then, their great value, and these are only part—I must remind you—part of what I have gathered. You wish to know the worth of these stones here. Um To be precise, I should have to work it all out"

"They would buy a soul, wouldn't they?—a soul?" she whispered now, hysteria clutching at her throat.

"My dear Evelyn, I don't understand. Souls are matters for our spiritual directors. Don't stare like that, I beg Now, my dear, put your heart into it, for I have not much time. I have to meet the five-forty from London"

"Man safe—come five-forty." She remembered the wire.

"Why?" she burst out feverishly, the jewels slipping from her hands. "Why?" She questioned as one who would have an answer.

"Evelyn, you've dropped them." He fell upon his knees, slowly and painfully, advancing several caustic statements as to her extreme carelessness, and the absolute danger of jewels of worth rolling upon carpets.



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"Why?" she asked.



ed you all, I, cleverer than the rest, mistrusted

Why should this gentleman at large live in crazy Barham without a servant, without a soul to see where he went to at night? Why, I asked myself, should this sudden crop of burglaries arise precisely at the time this stranger came amongst us?"

He listened breathlessly, one hand upon her arm, her eyes frozen upon him. Oh, how blind he had been, not to understand that wire, not to receive the warning. Freddie, in his big chair, sat a little and peered out.

"Hanged old beast!" slid out Freddie softly, between his teeth.

"You all welcomed him. He was no doubt a friend of yours long ago—there was even, I gather, the vague mention of a girl in the trial. But I do not read newspapers. I quite understand your lack of suspicion. Remember the incident

Lady Elverton's locked box; that, I think, made me most suspicious. Ordinary men do not open locks so swiftly and easily. I watched. I longed to see you all so gulled by this gentleman. Then came the attempt upon Rockhampton. Reeves





His trusted young friend!" He chuckled harshly. "I trust he may not lose the stakes of the race."

The girl stared hard at the dim square of window. Could she warn Ernest? Was there a hope left to the hunted man?

"A most shocking case, the whole affair," went on Begbie pompously. "For the creature was a gentleman. By the way, did he ever explain his long disappearance to you? Oh, of course, the colonial story—yes, precisely. You would not think of doubting. Well, as I say, it was all so easy to deduce. He came down here to run most cleverly, under the cloak of a gentleman, a series of thefts. He has stolen Lady Elverton's emeralds."

"I don't believe it. He has NOT!" Was it Evelyn's own voice which seemed to spring unbidden from her throat? Was it Evelyn, the accuser, who stood there in her fair beauty bringing down her challenge to defend the absent man? She scarcely knew what had entered into her as she cried out the words, and knew that she meant them.



shaking his thin arm in her eagerness, but not a hard line in Begbie's face altered or relaxed. He stared at her with manifest displeasure.

"I really think, Evelyn"—his cold voice was harsh and irritable—"that you are not well. You ask me because this man was a gentleman, and used his birth as a cloak to get in here. You ask me, because he was once your passing friend, to condone a grave offence against the law when you should ask my pardon for not having warned me."

"I"—she loosed her arm and moved towards the window—"I—forgive me—I did not remember the law. I thought of humanity, and of a man who was your companion only last night."

"Right-o!" said wooden Freddie, from his open, wooden mouth.

"A man who has no money, no friends—I know something of him—who has spent his last penny to hunt here." How strange Ernest's arguments sounded from her lips! How she repeated the words she had laughed at in open disbelief! "A

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

Ha! ha! I wonder who he was after. No, in a very short time this person will be caught, and, as you have heard, there is no loophole left for doubt. Why, there is even the last incident of the bicycle flung across the hedge just as Payne came up. I have written it all to the police. And now, enough of this. Dear me, how the time has flown. Kindly turn to these stones, and make your choice. I must write a letter before I start, so will leave you for a moment."

"Make—my choice." Evelyn lifted a tray full of precious things. she lifted another, laying them out until the table was a glitter of colour, of rays meeting and clashing from their velvet beds.

"Ah! that is right," he said approvingly. "Now compare them."

"It is such a great choice," she said, looking at him and putting the trays back. "A life's choice."

"I am aware of its importance," he said, rubbing his dry hands. "Oh, you will become them well, my dear. Select a necklace, a pendant, some head ornaments, and copy the numbers down, and list the stones. Call in Grant to help. Bear in mind that the background will be white brocade."

"Satin!" she flashed out.

"As you will. But do not delay."

"I will not—in making my choice," she said, as he went out; but she left the table, running to the window. How the storm-clouds raced. Cold showers lashed down through lacing boughs; the clipped yews stood out blackly, dark as enclosing walls, as prison walls. She stood there,

her brain a chaos. Freddie, coming slowly to life, slipped unheard from his deep chair.

Freddie had won a large sum in ready money over Hotspur; it was still in his pocket-book, and the little man had come to a sudden resolution.

Reeves was a gentleman, penniless perhaps, as Evelyn had said. He could not believe the man had stolen the emeralds in a friend's house. He could not forget the good advice which Violet had swallowed with such wry faces. Prison was a hideous thought to careless little Freddie Floyd. He pulled the notes out, counting them. He would slip over in his motor, take Reeves away in it, and give him a chance of escape. Freddie put the band round his pocket-book, and Evelyn turned.

"Where have you come from, Freddie?" she said drearily.

"From sleep," he said, eyeing her.

She was troubled—any one could see that, but he believed she would forget everything in the joy of the glittering things upon the table.

"Another man might have kissed my Violet," thought Freddie to himself.

she tell Freddie?—beg him to fly to Reeves? Could she trust the feather-brained little man? She shook her head. He might not believe her—might only join with Begbie against the suspected thief.

"I'm going out," said Freddie, grimacing at the window. "Nue night aint it? Out to see a friend. I haven't much time to waste either."

He shut the door. The clock ticked on, with maddening regularity. Ching! it rang the quarter past four—no, it was twice—the half-hour.

She opened the conservatory, letting in a drift of warm, scented air. She turned again to the case upon the table. How she loved those things—better than anything on earth.

Tick, tick, went the clock—tick, tick. Her uncle's small motor was in the stable. She had learnt to drive from Marks, taking some lessons since their mad spin across the downs. If she could get over to Barham, and drive Ernest away—up to London, away to a port, anywhere where he could escape. She had no money. But there were rings upon her fingers, or a handful of those wonderful unset gems. She moved back again, letting the jewels slip through loving fingers. Emeralds, green with jealousy; rubies, red as heart's blood; opals, changeful, beautiful. Ching went the clock. It was really the half-hour now. The naked lady, truth, came to her own now and was recognised. She knew the man had only stolen to please her—to gratify her madness for those precious stones. Now there lay before her, priceless, unique, all and

more than she had ever dreamt of—her life's desire. She hated poverty. Harold Begbie would never forgive her if she thwarted him; she knew him well enough for that. The lights glowed in the pretty room, with its brocade-covered furniture, flinging up mellow tints of mahogany and satin-wood; fell on Dresden shepherdesses ogling on the mantelpiece, on soft old prints hung on the cream-tinted walls. Poverty was bare and hideous, with its creak of dusty wicker and rasp of cheap carpet, and offence of imitation china. Poverty meant the glare of gas, the wearing of worn clothes, the staring once again through plate-glass windows. She knelt by the table. It was too late to alter now. These for a necklace—she held up the coloured diamonds, making them flash; thus for a pendant—the sapphire lay deep and lustrous in her palm, these rubies for her hair. Mrs. Begbie's wedding jewels, flames and ropes of priceless brilliance. Worth what? A soul? Had the clock clanged again? They were heavy, these things, and cold—the pink diamond spotted with blood. Some other soul should pay for them. She caught the heavy box and sent it crashing down, the jewels raining out in streams of fire; then, pinning Violet's cap to her fair hair, ran into the hall for a couple of cloaks, and fled out into the night.

Black showers fell sharply as she scurried to the yard. Marks was fortunately out, but the stableman ran the car from the garage, and she got in. There were half a dozen things to see to, which set Evelyn



in a fever of impatience—if the petrol tank was full for a long run, if all the spare things she might want were in. Ten minutes would take her to Barham. And then she could slip Reeves out into the car and away, despite the spying Granby. They would have half an hour's start, and they could alter the number somehow. How the wires would betray them. Half an hour must see their escape. For no power would ever wash Reeves white again. The man who flies must be guilty.

She came gently through the yard gates, the powerful headlight lighting up the thick dripping shrubs. It would be hard to run fast to-night, with the rain upon the screen, and she knew so pitifully little—merely how to steer. They nosed across the drive; the lighted window of the boudoir showed the overturned box, the flash of outraged gems. "I've made my choice," she whispered to the night, and the car, gathering speed, loped up the stretch of smooth avenue.

Indoors, Sir Henry gaping stood by his study fire, his pretty wife lying on the sofa.

"Susie!—Susie!" he cried. "Here's Freddie in, with some mad tale of Begbie suspecting Reeves, and I—I've known all along who took those emeralds, that's why I've known they'd come back."

"Who?" said Lady Elverton.

"Evelyn Gervaise, because she was jealous," he said solemnly. "That's what made me so unhappy. I've been absolutely certain of it."

Suzie, his wife, leaning back burst into hysterical laughter.

Begbie, in his stiff ulster, came to the boudoir door.

"You are choosing carefully, Evie, I trust," he said. He stood open-mouthed. A stream of precious things were overturned upon the table, jumbled into glorious medley. A few pearls and other things had rolled on to the floor, lying there in piteous, silent protest at this indignity; the conservatory door was wide open.

As Begbie, falling on his stiff knees, wailed for Mr. Grant, he did not know what could have happened. Bells pealed; questions were asked. The grooms, well bribed, knew nothing; but James had seen Miss Gervaise running out to take a cloak.

"She seemed unwell," gasped Begbie, finding a ruby by the table-leg. "You must return to-night, Mr. Grant; and she, Miss Gervaise, has left without making a decision and choice"

"Perhaps she made it before she left, sir," said Mr. Grant gravely

## CHAPTER XVI

### SPIDERS!

WHEN Ernest Reeves had said good-bye to his friends, had seen the hunters jog round the bend in the road, he turned away in bitterest dejection. He listened at the gate until the last tripple of the hoofs died into silence, and there was nothing to hear but the rave of the wind through the trees, the creaking movement of the leafless branches as they swayed to and fro. Then he walked up the long avenue, and, as he opened the big hall door and heard it clang behind him, the joy of the morning's ride died out; there was nothing left but the emptiness of the future. It was so dark and damp in the uninhabited house, that he went out again to tell his groom that he would not want him any more—that the horses were to be sold, as he was called away.

"Mr. Payne will buy them, I hope. Mr. Floyd takes the grey," he said dully. "I'm sorry to part with them, and with you. Good evening."

"Good evening, sir," said Jackson woodenly. He had lost a place, that was all. He did not care.

Reeves went in this time by a side door, his feet echoing down the long, uncarpeted corridor. The windows were uncleaned, cobwebs hung from the pictures—the scrubber was not doing her best by Barham. But there was a fire in the big dining-room blazing cheerily. A loaf of bread upon the table flanked the Crown Derby and Worcester set, ready to make tea in, and Mrs. Hodge, to celebrate his return, had made him a cake.

"Hodge do say I have a light hand in them," she said, "and I made bold, sir. You'll miss Claxton cooking here."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hodge." Something stung Reeves's eyes as he laid the cake down. The old woman's welcome touched him—yet she would probably scream and run away if she knew that he was a convict.

Miss Claxton. He sank listlessly into a chair. How he missed it—the firelit, cosy rooms; the servants moving about; Violet's light, high-pitched voice; Sir Henry's fussy bass boom; Evelyn's . . . he stopped then and his face set in bitter gloom. Evelyn, who believed the worst of him. And now the afternoon waned, and there was so much to do; morning must not find him here. There were letters to write. One to Freddie, asking him to take Payne's money, and pay up everything for him. He had no time, he wrote, and would write his address later. "There's rent, and wages," said Reeves to himself; "not so much left."

A letter to his withered, twisted little friend—a kindly letter, telling him to marry and quit the cross

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one must see the shabby clothes and wig in his hands. It was only Mrs. Hodge coming up with the kettle, and laboriously toiling on to tell him.

"All right, I'm coming, Mrs. Hodge," he called down the dark well of the stairs. "Call for letters before you go."

"I'll be earlier to-night, sir. Hodge wants me, and there's a sight to do at home."

Her heavy, shuffling feet clumped off, a cross door banged, and the silence of the empty house returned almost solidly.

He ran on to the bright dining-room, the clot upon his arm. He hung them over a chair the looking at them sadly.

*Sic transit gloria mundi*

As they had not called upon him to use the sturdy little revolver it was a longer a more weary death—a mere struggle for existence after his brief flight in the clouds. The man's whole soul was oppressed by hopeless sadness. After all, the flash in his eyes, the blinding crash which was the end, might be far easier for him. The emeralds were still upon the table, there was time to rip out a stone or two and, at least, carry the power to live in comfort with him. A snick of a knife upon the strings, a wrench or two at those glittering stones—that was all.

He laughed, putting the iron kettle upon the fire, laying the precious blue-and-red-and-gold teapot to warm by the fire. How the thin, long-nosed woman in the picture would have sprung bottled to its rescue.

He was tired out, mentally and physically. He wanted his tea.

Clop! clop! What was that? His overstrung nerves sprang tauter still with a jar of quivering fear. Who came to see him at this hour? Was he too late? He moved the clothes into the shadow, picked up the revolver, and went to the door.

Clop! clop! clop! The old-fashioned knocker was suffering hard usage.

He clicked the revolver to full-cock.

"Are you all deaf?" wailed a petulant voice. "I've knocked—oh, for hours and hours; the bell doesn't ring; and it's raining, and my shoes are soaked. Oh, Mr. Reeves! Hi! . . . Mr. Reeves!" A furious staccato of entreaty and anger.

"The Butterfly! Hang her," said Reeves softly, as he swung back the door. Violet had kept her promise.

Granby, crouching in the dripping laurels, breathed a sigh of relief. "A young lady, Miss St. Maur—that's a good thing, then he won't go out," he said, and tucked his damp muffler higher round his neck.

"I said I'd come to tea. You might have expected me."

The tempestuous entrance of Miss St. Maur and her bicycle was marked by distinct ill-humour.

Reeves stared at her blankly.

"Pull at the bobbin, and the latch will go up," he said, with dreary humour. "You must not come in, Miss St. Maur."

"Mustn't I?" said Violet placidly. "Are the dampers ready? I"—the bewitching glance was





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"Mustn't I?" said Violet placidly. "Are the dampers ready? I"—the bewitching glance was

## Lady Elverton's Emeralds

came from the dark-nest house. It was only Floyd leaving, and the man's nerves grew queer. As long as Reeves was still safe, he had not to do with scientific matters. A hobbling shadow came from a side door moving smartly down the avenue. The shaken Granby pursued it full trot. It was Mrs. Hodge, making, letter-laden, for home. The dread word "Law" made her show the envelopes in her hands.

Granby contrived the lot promptly. He felt this was quite within his rights. He then returned to the dripping shelter of the laurel-bush and to think over all he would say to Captain Floyd when he met him.

It was a bitter night, with storm-wrack, driven fast by a shrieking wind, constant lash of cold rain upon earth and trees, a damp chill, which would not be denied, creeping over the watcher.

Inside, the three sat by the fire, and for a space stared at each other dumbly.

Then Evelyn broke the silence.

"You are mad, Vi," she said piteously. "The emeralds may not be found here, but what of all the other things?"

Violet laughed at the elder girl's stricken face.

"There will not be one shade of evidence," she said. "It will be mate for old Begbie. Beg your pardon, dear. He'll bluster and storm and assert, and he'll dread the action for defamation of character which we'll threaten him with. It's all too delightful for words—a regular romance. You shall dine at Claxton to-night, Mr. Reeves."

"Dine at Claxton!" He stared at her. "I, who have been in prison?"

The girl laughed again. There was some true kindness under the shallow ripple of her nature.

"Sir Henry and my aunt, when they hear the story, will believe it," she said stoutly. "I am not good at thinking of trouble, but the thought of your past life makes me shudder and long to help you."

Yet Evelyn sat with clasped hands, listening, starting; not one word of Violet's chatter coming to her ears. She knew Harold Begbie. She had heard the long string of evidence. Before her tortured eyes they would drag this man away, arrested on suspicion, and she would stand convicted in her own mind as his ruin for ever.

"Oh, if you had only gone away," she moaned, and then the big clock struck sonorously, the gravel crunched under a horse's leet, the knocker clanged to a steady, vigorous hand.

Out in the driving rain Begbie was contented and triumphant. His man was safe—would be caught red-handed. He did not wait to hear anything from Granby, but strode to the door, knocking loudly.

"Let them get wet. Let them wait." Violet sprang to the seething kettle. She saw it boil again and made fresh tea, with a child's rest and lun.

"Oh, we'll annoy him," she murmured. "He'll rage at our little party."

"Bang! Clomp!" went the knocker. Voices were raised now.

Violet lifted her mischievous face; on tiptoe she stole out, slid back the catch, and fled in a twinkling. Next time they rattled at the handle they would get in. It was all fun to her; to the others, disaster.

"Act, you two," she said. "I was the Sleeping Beauty in a tableau once, and I only winked once at the Prince before he woke me. Act! Don't let him find you like Mrs. Siddons and Henry Irving playing Macbeth together in Paradise."

"Oh, Ernest!" Evelyn took the man's cold hand. "Ernest, I am afraid."

"And I," he said simply. "But we won't show it, Evie. There goes the handle. Tea, Miss St. Maur? Yes; we'll act."

"Thank you," said Violet, in the tones with which one hails a ship. "Cream please," she laughed shrilly.

Steady steps in the hall.

"Will you take cake and sugar and in your tea, or both?"

"Both," said Violet choking, and almost hysterical.

The door swung open. The men in the shadow were dimly seen, but they started at the merry party by the fire. There was no symptom of guilt about the man who poured tea out from a gay gold-and-blue tea-pot and handed it blindly—to no one; but they did not notice that. His teeth were set, as he looked into the shadows, and saw the clean-shaven faces come on to the light.

"Hallo, Mr. Harris. Want anything? You see me in other places to the last we met in now."

Begbie had found a man who knew the ex-convict.

"You here, Miss St. Maur, and Evelyn—you here? This man's impudence is colossal," muttered Begbie. "Send these ladies away, Reeves," he said with pompous sternness. "We have come to tell you your game is up."

"I really don't understand you," said Reeves, with patient politeness. "Have some tea? What is it—private theatricals?"

"No; public theft." The thin man flung his bomb. "Give up Lady Elverton's emeralds, my fine fellow. We know you have not disposed of them, for we have watched you."

He looked for the start—the scream of the two girls; watched for the shudder of the shock. They merely smiled. Violet took some more cake. Evelyn held out her cup for tea.

"We've got a warrant, Hampshire." The man called Harris spoke sharply. "Better own up and come quietly. It wasn't quite clever enough, with a man like Mr. Begbie here—a man who has so much of his own to guard. Lord! he spotted you a week ago, he did."

"While Fitson chased over all the country," Begbie rubbed his dry hands together.

"I don't quite understand," said Reeves, still politely, still patiently.

"You don't understand, you gaol-bird!" Begbie turned on him with a coarse snarl. "You, who dared to come among us all and charm us with

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"You have no proof. Send these men away!" Evelyn's voice, ringing out in sudden anger. Oh, you!" Begbie turned. "I have a way to you, Evelyn." He spoke as a future and. "You came here to warn this man—ure of that."

"Yes. I came here to see him, and to warn him," she said steadily. "I knew all along he had been in prison, as I know now. He never stole the emeralds, or anything else."

"Fine, foolish words." The thin man felt he hated Reeves—his soured soul rose in protest against this popularity. "This felon bewitches you women. Enough of that. Were you mad, to rush away, leaving my jewels unguarded? I found them flung down—rubies, emeralds, pearls, upon the floor. It took me twenty minutes to restore order. Your conduct was most unseemly. I left you to make your choice——"

"And I made it." She brushed past the two policemen, and stood by Reeves. "Here it is," she cried, silencing his protests.

"I fail to understand," sneered Begbie furiously. "He is scarcely a jewel to wear."

"He is—if he considers me worthy." She was defiantly loving, standing by the accused man's side, and all the bitterness of wasted time laid cold fingers upon him. Oh, had she done that years ago, he could have cleared himself. Too late to make atonement now. Yet he loved her for it, and, looking into her glowing face, felt Hope flutter her soft wings across the room.

"Evelyn, are you mad?" Begbie sat down amazed, staring at his fiancée. What did it all mean? "I don't understand you," he said, almost leebly.

"No? Then, you shall. This man you watched and tracked was once my lover. You *shall* hear." Quickly, refusing to be stopped, she told the bitter story again, in fewer, tenser words, but no less clearly. "He never stole—he never stole," she pleaded in the end.

Inspector Harris had made the words "blest" and "blow" very tired; he kept them going still, and a sudden cold made him blow his nose violently, as if in sympathy with the utterance.

He knew the law. Let the girl plead on with white face and outstretched hands—it would avail in nothing. The net was about Ernest Hampshire's feet, and the trapped bird must be carried to its cage. Innocence so long dead was a useless thing. The shadow of the proven guilt would do its work. And yet Inspector Harris believed her, so blew his nose again, and searched for nothing in the shadows.

Rage, thwarted triumph, a pale ghost of thwarted desire, shook Harold Begbie to the heart. He himself was publicly shamed by this woman. She would come forward—recite this in public. People would laugh at him, the great jewel collector. He sprang to his feet, snarling at her in impotent anger.

"See—take your ring!" She flung the great sparkling things down. "You will not regret me much. Any other peg will do as well, to hang your



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jewels on. Yet you were kind to me, and I  
 "worry," she added.

"You had the finest shoulders I have ever seen  
 he said crossly, with unconscious pathos. "I am  
 upset, annoyed. I have been infamously treated  
 But—" a gust of rage swept all other thought  
 from his head. He put the rings away, and stood up,  
 snapping out sharp anger. She chose to belittle  
 him for this common felon, to fling jewels on the  
 table and leave them there, a prey to any servant,  
 while she fled to warn her lover. She had allowed  
 this infamous thief to wander at loose among decent  
 people. "You women are shielding him," he  
 shrieked, almost hysterically, "but I tell you,  
 Miss Gervaise, you shall see your precious lover  
 discovered—shall see him in prison again, where he  
 has no chance of being your accomplice."  
 "Sh-h!" said Miss St. Maur, getting up. "My  
 dear Mr. Begbie, do you want to be knocked down  
 or shot? Look!"

She pointed to Ernest Reeves's clenched fist, and,  
 then to the revolver on the table.

Inspector Harris removed it, with a quick gesture.  
 "Do your duty," foamed Begbie. "Arrest the  
 man—search him. And you two," he cried—"we'll  
 have you searched, too, later on."

The girls shrank together, protesting angrily.

"Hoot! toot! toot! Hoot!" then the scream  
 of a siren—*tti!*

"Freddie!" Violet sprang forward. "Oh, my  
 Freddie!" she cried, and flew out.

There was a sound of pattering feet, a rustle of

silks, and Susie Elverton, a fur coat muffling her pretty tea-gown, ran breathlessly in. Excitable at all times, she was clearly almost hysterical now.

"Stop the police!" she cried, and shook Begbie heartily, until the amazed man jumped away. "Stop the police!" She shook Reeves, passed from him quickly, and, seizing Inspector Harris by the lapels of his coat, dragged him forward, with a satisfied air. "He's police. Stop him!" she cried. "At once! I demand it! I have flown here, Freddie hooting like a—a——"

"An owl," said Violet demurely.

"Not at all, child—a lost soul. Yes. Oh, where was I?"

Inspector Harris, standing dumbly in the attitude of a dog which has been killing hens, and is led forward for punishment, suggested she was "'oldin' on to 'im."

"Oh, yes. You're the police. It's the emeralds. Found under my carpet. They must have slipped in there. And you—oh, Mr. Begbie, you've arrested a guest of mine. When these things were found, we did not *come* here, we merely started and arrived—fell into the laurels and dashed up the steps. Freddie would bring me. He said Evelyn would want me with her."

She opened the case. Green rays of fire darted across the room, as the great perfect stones were exposed. A ripple of perfection, they nestled on their white velvet bed, and Susie Elverton, distraught from joy, touched them lovingly.

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Then "Don't make it harder," he whispered last, touching her soft, fair hair

"Take care," shot out Susie Elverton to Begbie

"It's all hearay Yes, take care, y'know," chimed in Freddie

"Beloved! Good-bye!" whispered Reeves to the sobbing girl. He did not hear the others as they chattered futile remonstrance.

Heavy hands touched Reeves, not unkindly, but with solid, hopeless authority. He drew a long breath—the cold snap of the handcuffs seemed about his wrist.

Then a quiet little man came strolling into the open doorway, knocking at it respectfully, then starting in blank amazement.

"Reg'lar stage pictar," he muttered. "What's up, Harris. Eh?"

"Taken the Claxton man, Mr. Fitson," said Harris pompously. "You're late." For this Fitson was a noted man, and he had been outwitted.

"Taken—Hampshire!" Fitson looked at the stricken man and whistled. He whistled again, as Begbie, full of fiery wrath, which joyed in hurting any one, ran through his long chain of evidence, and sneered at the great detective.

"Very complete, sir," said Fitson cheerily.

"We should have you at the Yard, Mr. Begbie—so we should. Yes, lucky I came in. I'd only just got hold of Hampshire being down here. In fact, got a letter to tell me." He turned as bespoke. "I never connected him with a hunting man and friend of Sir Henry Elverton's, but, when I did hear,

I came straight round to see him and ask." He paused.

Begbie tasted a little triumph.

"I knew it almost from the first," he sneered. "He was close to you when you came out with the gardener, on your stale scent."

"Stupid fellow I am. Yes. Well, directly I did hear it, as I say, I strolled round to see if the thief had run across him, for they were side by side in hospital, I know."

"If--what?" Begbie turned sickly pale. "The thief is here. What do you mean now?"

"I mean Jim the Cracksman, by nickname. His own, no one really knows." Fitson grew wrathful. "And a blooman' eel by nater. Let Hampshire go, Harris. He was never on it. There's evidence enough to convict a dozen men in Bateson's cottage."

"Bateson, the gardener?" cried Freddie.

"Oh, Bateson, the gardener. It was a clever lay; them mushrooms set me thinking first, but I went too slowly, an' missed him. He lumps when he likes, and walks sound when he likes. I was after him at the races, and he slipped me in the crowd. I went there now, and found his tools in the salad-frame—I thought the plants looked droopy. Bits of stuff, too—odd settings and heavy bracelets. You're very clever, Mr. Begbie; but Hampshire here has never been under suspicion since his release . . . and Jim—we've marked his work three times and more."

The heavy hands slipped from Reeves's shoulders,

the despair from his heart. This man had trampled down little Jim, and he was free of suspicion. They were talking, chattering, exclaiming all round him.

"I suspected Jim from the first," said Reeves quietly. "when I heard of a limping gardener who grew mushrooms in a month. I went to the cottage to see him the night of the Monkshill affair, but he was out, and after that he avoided me. I only met him once, that was when he came to Claxton," he said with a smile.

"Yes," said Fitson eagerly. "And he told me he'd never work on the cross again," said Reeves. "I could not give him away—we were friends."

"Even to save yourself. You were always a fool," said Fitson gruffly. "His cottage was empty when I came to it, and nothing there. He had word of me. I saw you go in, and thought you were a customer."

"And I thought you were after me, and nearly killed myself running away," said Reeves comically—"on Jim's bike, too."

"Lor', what a lot of trouble you'd have saved if you'd stayed," said Fitson grumpily. "You took the only evidence with you. Well, I was born to be beat by little Jim. He'll write to me when I marry next month, and send me mushrooms likely." Fitson was not devoid of humour.

The head bent upon Reeves's shoulder was slowly raised. Eyes, no longer tear-dimmed, gazed into his. "Then you cannot get rid of me, Ernest," whispered a low, happy voice.

"I'm blest and blowed if I'm not glad," burst out Harris suddenly. His irrepressible subordinate was snapping his fingers to control his emotion. "Queerest picnic I ever come to. I wish you joy, miss," he said, with clumsy kindness.

"I wish you all common sense," said Begbie, jumping round.

"No further use for me, I suppose, sir?" Mr. Fitson's sure to be right. Come along, you giraffe"—this in a furious undertone to the contorted constable. The law melted from the room to quarrel wildly outside, and depart, three heated and annoyed men, to catch the next train for London.

The fog cleared. Reeves touched the hands upon his arm.

"Ewie, it's still good-bye," he said, "though the horror has receded, who am I to drag you down? But in the long years to come I shall remember that you believed in me at last, and I shall not be unhappy. Don't fret—it must be I have a clean start now. Floyd, how can I thank you?" he said to Freddie

"By giving me a whisky-and-soda," said Freddie prosaically. "I'm quite upset. And now, look here, old man—Reeves, we'll say, I think, always I've a place in Worcestershire, and a lot of thorough-breds—mares and so on; the manager's just dead. No one will know you there. You can take in horses besides, if you like. It will be a fresh start; for I fancy we may rely on Begbie here to be, for his own sake, silent. He might get a bit laughed

at otherwise." He nodded pleasantly towards the furious man. "There's a nice house, and a centage and a few hundreds a year. By degrees we may make it a big thing. What say? Eh?"

"Freddie, you're a dear. We'll go to Grange in the autumn and hunt there," whispered Violet.

He laid his hand on his little lover's shoulder.

"To flirt with Reeves, eh?" he said wistfully.

"To flirt with Freddie, the cleverest man on earth," she said stoutly.

"Only a foolish little fellow, who loves you," he said simply; but a gleam of happiness, brighter than he had even hoped for, touched Freddie Floyd—a world he had scarcely dared to hope for opened before him. They stood like children, hand in hand, while the others clustered round Reeves, urging the quiet man whose life had been a tragedy. Hope, gay plumaged, flew open now, but, with eyes dim from fear, he dared not look at her.

A home down in the peaceful country, horses about him, no fears of discovery to dog his footsteps—just the right to live, the means to do it on. He dropped his head on to his hands, and was not ashamed before them all, because, when he raised it, his eyes were wet. The bitterness of the past seemed to roll up as a scroll, the future was so fair to him, he scarcely dared to look at it. Sweetest of all, they believed him. Evelyn had cleared his name to them. Pity, and not blame, was what they meted out to him.

"I—it's too much," he whispered to Freddie.

"Not at all, don't-cher-know," said Freddie, blushing hotly. "It's settled then."

"And I am frozen," said Lady Elverton. "Mr. Reeves, as I fell out of my door, I told them to light your fire in your room." She said it almost carelessly.

"You'd ask me back," he said—"knowing what I've been? But there's Sir Henry." There were tears in his eyes.

"Sir Henry is my husband," said her ladyship briskly. "There is the Daimler for us now—I ordered it. It will bring you and Evelyn."

"I should like, Lady Elverton," said Begbie stiffly, "to have my things sent after me to London." He stood in the doorway, biting at his thin fingers. These were hours then, when the bait of great jewels fell away, and was naught.

He was told politely it should be so . . . bidden cold good-byes as they went out. Begbie had to walk, for the police had taken the hired trap.

Ernest and Evelyn stood alone in the big dim room, where a lifetime of emotion seemed to have passed over their heads.

"You'll take me back then?" she whispered, and pulled a ring from her pocket—a little, discoloured, valueless thing, battered and bent.

"Evie, I never put you away," he said. The tired lines were leaving his face; a great and wonderful peace lulled him. "But I shall be very poor, Evie, and yours was a brilliant future. Dear, will you never regret the jewels?"



She held out the little turquoise ring to him, with her third finger ready.

"No, for I have found a jewel which outshines them all," she said steadily, and saw the discoloured turquoise slip to its old home. "It's the jewel of love, Ernest."

"Th-h!" snarled Begbie, who was still in the doorway; but, as he stalked away, he wondered if it were true.

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